



INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification: C12N 15/53, 15/82, A01H 5/00, C12Q 1/02	A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 97/35986 (43) International Publication Date: 2 October 1997 (02.10.97)
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(54) Title: NUCLEIC ACID MOLECULES ENCODING CYTOCHROME P450-TYPE PROTEINS INVOLVED IN THE BRASSINOSTEROID SYNTHESIS IN PLANTS (57) Abstract The invention describes nucleic acid molecules encoding cytochrome P450-type proteins involved in the brassinosteroid synthesis in plants, transgenic plant cells and plants containing such nucleic acid molecules as well as processes for the identification of other proteins involved in brassinosteroid synthesis and processes for the identification of substances acting as brassinosteroids or as brassinosteroid inhibitors in plants.		

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Nucleic acid molecules encoding cytochrome P450-type proteins involved in the brassinosteroid synthesis in plants

The present invention relates to nucleic acid molecules encoding cytochrome P450-type proteins involved in the brassinosteroid synthesis in plants, to transgenic plant cells and plants containing such nucleic acid molecules as well as to processes for the identification of other proteins involved in brassinosteroid synthesis and processes for the identification of substances acting as brassinosteroids or as brassinosteroid inhibitors in plants.

In 1979 a novel plant growth-promoting factor, termed brassinolide, was isolated from the pollen of rape (*Brassica napus*) and identified as a novel type of steroid lactone. It was found that brassinolide-like steroid compounds (called brassinosteroids) occur in all plant species examined at very low concentrations (for review, see Mandava, Ann. Rev. Plant Physiol. Plant Mol. Biol. 39 (1988), 23-52). Initial studies of the physiological action of brassinolide showed that this particular factor (i) accelerated the germination and growth of plant seedlings at low temperatures, (ii) promoted the increase of cell size and elongation by induction of a longitudinal arrangement of cortical microtubuli and cellulose microfilaments on the surface of cells, (iii) promoted xylem differentiation by amplifying the tracheal elements, (iv) resulted in significant increase of dry weight of plants and their fruits, (v) promoted leaf unrolling and enlargement, (vi) induced H⁺ export and membrane hyperpolarization characteristic for auxin induced cell growth, (vii) inhibited the division of crown-gall tumour cells and radial growth of stems, (viii) repressed anthocyanin production in light-grown plants, (ix) inhibited the de-etiolation induced, e.g. by cytokinin in the dark, (x) promoted tissue senescence in the dark, but prolonged the life-span of plants in the light and (xi) induced plant pathogen resistance responses to numerous bacterial and fungal species (listed by Mandava (1988), loc. cit.).

Following the initial isolation of and physiological studies with brassinolides, numerous brassinosteroid compounds, representing putative biosynthetic intermediates, were identified in different plant species. Because the *in vivo* concentration of these compounds was found to be extremely low, efforts had been

2

made to develop methods for chemical synthesis of these compounds (for review, see: Adam and Marquardt, *Phytochem.* 25 (1986), 1787-1799). These compounds were tested in field experiments using soybean, maize, rice and other crops as well as trees in order to confirm the results of physiological studies. However, the field trials showed that due to poor uptake of steroids through the plant epidermis, the amount of steroids required for spraying or fertilization was considerable. Several methods for the chemical synthesis of brassinolides had been described since then, however, their practical use in agriculture is rather limited. Because the price of brassinolide treatments is comparably high, their application cannot compete with the application of other known fertilizers and pesticides. Thus, up to now the practical application of these compounds has largely been abandoned, except for their occasional application as crop safeners.

The interest in brassinosteroids as possible growth regulators has furthermore faded since plant physiologists claimed that physiological data did not indicate that these compounds were indeed functional growth factors because their concentrations in most plant species were very low in comparison to other growth factors, such as auxins, cytokinins, abscisic acid, ethylene and gibberellins. In addition, no plant mutant defective in brassinolide synthesis was available to demonstrate that these compounds are essential for plant growth and development. Therefore, brassinosteroids were classified as minor secondary plant metabolites with a questionable biological function.

In order to be able to demonstrate that brassinosteroids can indeed be used as potential growth regulators of plants and to exploit the possible advantages and potentials of these substances, it would be necessary to identify plant mutants defective in brassinosteroid synthesis which would allow the characterization of genes involved in brassinosteroid synthesis.

Thus, the problem underlying the present invention is to identify plant mutants defective in brassinosteroid synthesis and to identify nucleic acid molecules encoding proteins involved in the synthesis of brassinosteroids in plants.

3

The problem is solved by the provision of the embodiments characterized in the claims.

Thus, the invention relates to nucleic acid molecules encoding a protein having the biological, namely the enzymatic, activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase or encoding a biologically active fragment of such a protein. Such nucleic acid molecules encode preferably a protein that comprises the amino acid sequence shown in Seq ID No. 2 or a fragment thereof that has the biological activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase. More preferably such nucleic acid molecules comprise the nucleotide sequence shown in Seq ID No. 1, namely the indicated coding region, or a corresponding ribonucleotide sequence.

The present invention also relates to nucleic acid molecules coding for a protein having the amino acid sequence as coded for by the exons of the nucleotide sequence given in SEQ ID NO:3 or coding for a fragment of such a protein, wherein the protein and the fragment have the biological activity of a cytochrome P450 hydroxylase. In particular, the present invention relates to nucleic acid molecules comprising the nucleotide sequence depicted in SEQ ID NO:3, namely the nucleotide sequence of the indicated exons, or a corresponding ribonucleotide sequence.

Furthermore, the present invention relates to nucleic acid molecules which hybridize to any of the nucleic acid molecules as described above and which code for a protein having the biological activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase or for a biologically active fragment of such a protein as well as to nucleic acid molecules which are complementary to any of the nucleic acid molecules as described above.

The present invention also relates to nucleic acid molecules encoding a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase, or a biologically active fragment thereof, the sequence of which differs from the sequence of the above-described nucleic acid molecules due to the degeneracy of the genetic code.

By "hybridizing" it is meant that such nucleic acid molecules hybridize under conventional hybridization conditions, preferably under stringent conditions such as described by, e.g., Sambrook et al. (Molecular Cloning; A Laboratory Manual, 2nd Edition, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press, Cold Spring Harbor, NY (1989)). Nucleic acid molecules hybridizing with the above-described nucleic acid molecules

can in general be derived from any plant possessing such molecules, preferably from monocotyledonous or dicotyledonous plants, in particular from any plant of interest in agriculture, horticulture or wood culture, such as crop plants, namely those of the family Poaceae, any other starch producing plants, such as potato, manioc, leguminous plants, oil producing plants, such as oilseed rape, linseed, etc., plants using protein as storage substances, such as soybean, plants using sucrose as storage substance, such as sugar beet or sugar cane, trees, ornamental plants etc. Preferably the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention are derived from plants belonging to the family Brassicaceae. Nucleic acid molecules hybridizing to the above-described nucleic acid molecules can be isolated, e.g., from libraries, such as cDNA or genomic libraries by techniques well known in the art. For example, hybridizing nucleic acid molecules can be identified and isolated by using the above-described nucleic acid molecules or fragments thereof or complements thereof as probes to screen libraries by hybridizing with said molecules according to standard techniques. Possible is also the isolation of such nucleic acid molecules by applying the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using as primers oligonucleotides derived from the above-described nucleic acid molecules.

The term "hybridizing nucleic acid molecules" also includes fragments, derivatives and allelic variants of the above-described nucleic acid molecules that code for a protein having the biological activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase or a biologically active fragment thereof. Fragments are understood to be parts of nucleic acid molecules long enough to code for the described protein or a biologically active fragment thereof. The term "derivative" means in this context that the nucleotide sequence of these nucleic acid molecules differs from the sequences of the above-described nucleic acid molecules in one or more positions and are highly homologous to said nucleic acid molecules. Homology is understood to refer to a sequence identity of at least 40%, particularly an identity of at least 60%, preferably more than 80% and still more preferably more than 90%. The deviations from the sequences of the nucleic acid molecules described above can, for example, be the result of substitutions, deletions, additions, insertions or recombination.

Homology further means that the respective nucleic acid molecules or encoded proteins are functionally and/or structurally equivalent. The nucleic acid molecules

that are homologous to the nucleic acid molecules described above and that are derivatives of said nucleic acid molecules are, for example, variations of said nucleic acid molecules which represent modifications having the same biological function, in particular encoding proteins with the same biological function. They may be naturally occurring variations, such as sequences from other plant varieties or species, or mutations. These mutations may occur naturally or may be obtained by mutagenesis techniques. Furthermore, these variations may be synthetically produced sequences. The allelic variations may be naturally occurring variants as well as synthetically produced or genetically engineered variants.

The proteins encoded by the various derivatives and variants of the above-described nucleic acid molecules share specific common characteristics, such as enzymatic activity, molecular weight, immunological reactivity, conformation, etc., as well as physical properties, such as electrophoretic mobility, chromatographic behaviour, sedimentation coefficients, pH optimum, temperature optimum, stability, solubility, spectroscopic properties, etc.

Cytochrome P450 proteins can be characterized by several features. For example, they are membrane-associated NAD(P)H dependent monooxygenases which normally form in vivo a complex with reductases. The CO-complex of these proteins shows an absorption maximum in the range of 450 nm.

The proteins encoded by the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention comprise preferably domains characteristic for cytochrome P450 proteins, especially those characteristic for microsomal cytochrome P450 proteins, such as the conserved N-terminal membran-anchoring domain, the proline rich domain, the heme-binding domain and the oxygen-binding domain (see, for example, Nebert and Gonzalez, Ann. Rev. Biochem. 56 (1987), 945-993). Furthermore, it is preferred that the proteins encoded by the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention contain domains characteristic for steroid hydroxylases, namely steroid binding domains. Preferably the proteins have the enzymatic activity of a steroid hydroxylase.

In a preferred embodiment the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention encode a cytochrome P450-type protein with the enzymatic activity of a hydroxylase which is involved in the conversion of cathasterone to teasterone (see Figure 1). This

enzymatic activity may be determined by feeding experiments as described in the examples.

The proteins encoded by the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention which, due to the presence of certain domains and due to their enzymatic activity can be classified as cytochrome P450 proteins, display overall a very low homology to known cytochrome P450s (less than 40%). Thus, these proteins are novel and constitute a new family of cytochrome P450 proteins with a novel substrate specificity.

The nucleic acid molecules according to the invention are preferably RNA or DNA molecules, preferably cDNA or genomic DNA.

The present invention is based on the finding that a particular *Arabidopsis* mutant generated by gene-tagging, which showed dwarfism and several other morphological and developmental abnormalities, can be restored to the wildtype phenotype by the addition of specific brassinosteroid compounds. Furthermore, the mutated gene and a corresponding cDNA had been isolated and characterized as encoding a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase, the overexpression of which in the tagged mutant can also restore the wildtype phenotype. Moreover, it has been found that overexpression of the cDNA in transgenic plants leads to several physiological and phenotypic changes which might be useful for the engineering of improved plants for agriculture, wood culture or horticulture.

The present invention provides evidence that the described nucleic acid molecules encode proteins with an enzymatic activity involved in brassinosteroid synthesis in plants. Furthermore, the present invention shows that a mutant defective in this enzyme activity shows severe physiological and phenotypic changes, for example, dwarfism, which can be reverted by addition of specific brassinosteroid compounds, and that plants overexpressing such an enzyme activity also show phenotypic changes, such as increased cell elongation.

Thus, the present invention for the first time clearly establishes that brassinosteroids are indeed of central importance as plant growth regulators and, furthermore, provides extremely useful tools to

- (i) identify mutants deficient in brassinosteroid synthesis;
- (ii) identify and isolate genes encoding proteins involved in the brassinosteroid synthesis in plants or in its regulation;
- (iii) generate plants with modified brassinosteroid synthesis and consequently with modified physiological and/or phenotypic characteristics; and
- (iv) identify compounds which may act as potential brassinosteroids on plants.

The different possible applications of the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention as well as molecules derived from them will be described in detail in the following.

In one aspect the present invention relates to nucleic acid probes which specifically hybridize with a nucleic acid molecule as described above. This means that they hybridize, preferably under stringent conditions, only with the nucleic acid molecules as described above and show no or very little cross-hybridization with nucleic acid molecules coding for other proteins. The nucleic acid probes according to the invention comprise a nucleic acid molecule of at least 15 nucleotides. Nucleic acid probe technology is well known to those skilled in the art who will readily appreciate that such probes may vary in length. The nucleic acid probes are useful for various applications. On the one hand, they may be used as PCR primers for amplification of nucleic acid molecules according to the invention. On the other hand, they can be useful tools for the detection of the expression of molecules according to the invention in plants, for example, by in-situ hybridization or Northern-Blot hybridization. Other applications are the use as hybridization probe to identify nucleic acid molecules hybridizing to the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention by homology screening of genomic or cDNA libraries. Nucleic acid probes according to the invention which are complementary to an RNA molecule as described above may also be used for repression of expression of such an RNA due to an antisense effect or for the construction of appropriate ribozymes which specifically cleave such RNA molecules. Furthermore, the person skilled in the art is well aware that it is also

possible to label such a nucleic acid probe with an appropriate marker for specific applications.

The present invention also relates to vectors, particularly plasmids, cosmids, viruses, bacteriophages and other vectors used conventionally in genetic engineering that contain a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention.

In a preferred embodiment the nucleic acid molecule present in the vector is linked to regulatory elements which allow the expression of the nucleic acid molecule in procaryotic or eucaryotic cells. Expression comprises transcription of the nucleic acid molecule into a translatable mRNA. Regulatory elements ensuring expression in procaryotic or eucaryotic cells are well known to those skilled in the art. In the case of eucaryotic cells they comprise normally promoters ensuring initiation of transcription and optionally poly-A signals ensuring termination of transcription and stabilization of the transcript. Additional regulatory elements may include transcriptional as well as translational enhancers.

The present invention furthermore relates to host cells comprising a vector as described above or a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention wherein the nucleic acid molecule is foreign to the host cell.

By "foreign" it is meant that the nucleic acid molecule is either heterologous with respect to the host cell, this means derived from a cell or organism with a different genomic background, or is homologous with respect to the host cell but located in a different genomic environment than the naturally occurring counterpart of said nucleic acid molecule. This means that, if the nucleic acid molecule is homologous with respect to the host cell, it is not located in its natural location in the genome of said host cell, in particular it is surrounded by different genes. In this case the nucleic acid molecule may be either under the control of its own promoter or under the control of a heterologous promoter. The vector or nucleic acid molecule according to the invention which is present in the host cell may either be integrated into the genome of the host cell or it may be maintained in some form extrachromosomally.

9

The host cell can be any procaryotic or eucaryotic cell, such as bacterial, fungal, plant or animal cells. Preferred fungal cells are, for example, those of the genus *Saccharomyces*, in particular those of the species *S. cerevisiae*.

The present invention furthermore relates to proteins encoded by the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention or to fragments of such proteins which have the biological activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase.

Furthermore, the present invention relates to antibodies specifically recognizing proteins according to the invention or parts, i.e. specific fragments or epitopes, of such proteins. Specific epitopes or fragments may, for example, comprise amino acid sequences which constitute domains which are characteristic for the proteins according to the invention, such as the substrate binding domain or the like.

These antibodies can be monoclonal antibodies, polyclonal antibodies or synthetic antibodies as well as fragments of antibodies, such as Fab fragments etc. These antibodies can be used, for example, for the immunoprecipitation and immunolocalization of proteins according to the invention as well as for the monitoring of the synthesis of such proteins, for example, in recombinant organisms, and for the identification of proteins interacting with the proteins according to the invention.

Another subject of the invention is a process for the preparation of such proteins which comprises the cultivation of host cells according to the invention which, due to the presence of a vector or a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention, are able to express such a protein, under conditions which allow expression of the protein and recovering of the so-produced protein from the culture. Depending on the specific constructs and conditions used, the protein may be recovered from the cells, from the culture medium or from both. For the person skilled in the art it is well known that it is not only possible to express a native protein but also to express the protein as fusion proteins or to add signal sequences directing the protein to specific compartments of the host cell, ensuring secretion of the protein into the culture medium, etc.

The nucleic acid molecules according to the invention are in particular useful for the genetic manipulation of plant cells in order to modify the brassinosteroid synthesis and to obtain plants with modified, preferably with improved or useful phenotypes.

Thus, the present invention relates also to transgenic plant cells which contain stably integrated into the genome a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention linked to regulatory elements which allow for expression of the nucleic acid molecule in plant cells and wherein the nucleic acid molecule is foreign to the transgenic plant cell. For the meaning of foreign, see supra.

The presence and expression of the nucleic acid molecule in the transgenic plant cells leads to the synthesis of a protein with the biological activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase which has an influence on brassinosteroid synthesis in the plant cells and leads to physiological and phenotypic changes in plants containing such cells.

Thus, the present invention also relates to transgenic plants comprising transgenic plant cells according to the invention.

Due to the expression of a protein having the biological activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase this transgenic plants may show various physiological, developmental and/or morphological modifications in comparison to wildtype plants.

For example, these transgenic plants may display an increased induction of pathogenesis related genes (see, for example, Uknes et al., Plant Cell 4 (1992), 645-656), modified morphology, namely a stimulation of growth, increased cell elongation and/or increased wood production due to stimulated xylem differentiation.

Furthermore, these transgenic plants may show accelerated seed germination at low temperatures, an increase in dry weight, repressed anthocyanin production during growth in light and/or inhibited de-etiolation which is induced, e.g. by cytokinin, in the dark.

The provision of the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention furthermore opens up the possibility to produce transgenic plant cells with a reduced level of the cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase as described above and, thus, with a defect in

brassinosteroid synthesis. Techniques how to achieve this are well known to the person skilled in the art. These include, for example, the expression of antisense-RNA, ribozymes, of molecules which combine antisense and ribozyme functions and/or of molecules which provide for a cosuppression effect.

When using the antisense approach for reduction of the above described enzymatic activity in plant cells, the nucleic acid molecule encoding the antisense-RNA is preferably is of homologous origin with respect to the plant species used for transformation. However, it is also possible to use nucleic acid molecules which display a high degree of homology to endogenously occurring nucleic acid molecules encoding the respective enzyme activity. In this case the homology is preferably higher than 80%, particularly higher than 90% and still more preferably higher than 95%.

The reduction of the synthesis of a protein according to the invention in the transgenic plant cells results in an alteration in the brassinosteroid synthesis and/or metabolism in the cells. In transgenic plants comprising such cells this can lead to various physiological, developmental and/or morphological changes.

Thus, the present invention also relates to transgenic plants comprising the above-described transgenic plant cells. These may show, for example, morphological changes, such as dwarfism, and/or developmental changes in comparison to wildtype plants, such as a reduced elongation of the hypocotyl of seedlings germinating in the dark or male sterility. Furthermore, these plants may display physiological changes in comparison to wildtype plants, such as an altered stress tolerance.

Preferably the transgenic plants according to the invention show at least one of the following features:

- the seedlings which result from germination in the dark have a short hypocotyl, no apical hook, open cotyledons and/or extended leaf primordia when compared to wildtype seedlings;
- the length of epidermal cell files in the hypocotyl is reduced about 5-fold when compared to wildtype plants;

12

- the length of epidermal cell files in the roots of the seedlings is decreased by about 20 to 50% when compared to wildtype plants;
- the epidermal cells of the hypocotyl show thick transverse files of cellulose fibers (see, for example, Figure 2 D,E);
- the epidermal cells of the hypocotyl show perpendicular divisions leading to differentiation of stomatal guard cells (Figure 2 B),
- the cotyledons show dense stomata and trichomes normally characteristic for leaves (Figure 2 C);
- derepression of photomorphogenesis and de-etiolation in the dark;
- a 20 to 30-fold reduction in size in comparison to wildtype plants when grown in soil under white light (dwarfism);
- a reduction of the number of longitudinal mesophyll cell files in leaves and a failure of palisade cells to elongate;
- an amplification and duplication of stomatal guard cells in the leaf epidermis (Figure 2 F,G);
- unequal division of cambium in the stem;
- production of extranumerary phloem cell files at the expense of xylem cells;
- the failure of the pollen to elongate during germination thereby resulting in male sterility;
- a differential regulation of stress responsive genes.

The present invention also relates to cultured plant tissues comprising transgenic plant cells as described above which either show overexpression of a protein according to the invention or a reduction in synthesis of such a protein.

In yet another aspect the invention also relates to harvestable parts and to propagation material of the transgenic plants according to the invention which either contain transgenic plant cells expressing a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention or which contain cells which show a reduced activity of the described protein. Harvestable parts can be in principle any useful parts of a plant, for example, leaves, stems, fruit, seeds, roots etc.

Propagation material includes, for example, seeds, fruits, cuttings, seedlings, tubers, rootstocks etc.

For the expression of the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention in sense or antisense orientation in plant cells, the molecules are placed under the control of regulatory elements which ensure the expression in plant cells. These regulatory elements may be heterologous or homologous with respect to the nucleic acid molecule to be expressed as well with respect to the plant species to be transformed. In general, such regulatory elements comprise a promoter active in plant cells. To obtain expression in all tissues of a transgenic plant, preferably constitutive promoters are used, such as the 35 S promoter of CaMV (Odell et al., Nature 313 (1985), 810-812) or promoters of the polyubiquitin genes of maize (Christensen et al., Plant Mol. Biol. 18 (1982), 675-689). In order to achieve expression in specific tissues of a transgenic plant it is possible to use tissue specific promoters (see, e.g., Stockhaus et al., EMBO J. 8 (1989), 2245-2251). Known are also promoters which are specifically active in tubers of potatoes or in seeds of different plants species, such as maize, Vicia, wheat, barley etc. Inducible promoters may be used in order to be able to exactly control expression. An example for inducible promoters are the promoters of heat shock proteins.

The regulatory elements may further comprise transcriptional and/or translational enhancers functional in plants cells.

Furthermore, the regulatory elements may include transcription termination signals, such as a poly-A signal, which lead to the addition of a poly A tail to the transcript which may improve its stability.

In the case that a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention is expressed in sense orientation it is in principle possible to modify the coding sequence in such a way that the protein is located in any desired compartment of the plant cell. These include the endoplasmatic reticulum, the vacuole, the mitochondria, the plastides, the apoplast, the cytoplasm etc. Methods how to carry out this modifications and signal sequences ensuring localization in a desired compartment are well known to the person skilled in the art.

Methods for the introduction of foreign DNA into plants are also well known in the art. These include, for example, the transformation of plant cells or tissues with T-DNA using *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* or *Agrobacterium rhizogenes* (EP-A 120 516; EP-A 116 718; Hoekema in: The Binary Plant Vector System, Offsetdrukkerij Kanter BV, Alblasterdam (1985), Chapter V; Fraley et al., Crit. Rev. Plant Sci. 4, 1-46 und An et al., EMBO J. 4 (1985), 277-287), the fusion of protoplasts, direct gene transfer (see, e.g., EP-A 164 575), injection, electroporation, biolistic methods like particle bombardment and other methods.

The transformation of most dicotyledonous plants is possible with the methods described above. But also for the transformation of monocotyledonous plants several successful transformation techniques have been developed. These include the transformation using biolistic methods (Wan and Lemaux, Plant Physiol. 104 (1994), 37-48; Vasil et al., Bio/Technology 11 (1993), 1553-1558), protoplast transformation, electroporation of partially permeabilized cells, introduction of DNA using glass fibers, etc.

In general, the plants which can be modified according to the invention and which either show overexpression of a protein according to the invention or a reduction of the synthesis of such a protein can be derived from any desired plant species. They can be monocotyledonous plants or dicotyledonous plants, preferably they belong to plant species of interest in agriculture, wood culture or horticulture interest, such as crop plants (e.g. maize, rice, barley, wheat, rye, oats etc.), potatoes, oil producing plants (e.g. oilseed rape, sunflower, pea nut, soy bean, etc.), cotton, sugar beet, sugar cane, leguminous plants (e.g. beans, peas etc.), wood producing plants, preferably trees, etc.

The present invention furthermore provides a process for the identification and isolation of nucleic acid molecules encoding proteins which are involved in brassinosteroid synthesis in plants or in its regulation which comprises the steps of:

- (a) screening naturally occurring, artificially mutagenised or genetically engineered dwarf mutants for those whose seedlings upon

germination in the dark display no or only little elongation of the hypocotyl;

- (b) identifying those dwarf mutants identified in step (a) in which elongation of the hypocotyl in the dark can be stimulated by adding different brassinosteroids or brassinosteroid-like compounds;
- (c) identification and isolation of the gene(s) which are capable of complementing those dwarf mutants identified in step (b);
- (d) characterization of the isolated gene(s) and its (their) encoded product(s).

This process is based on the finding that mutants which are defective in brassinosteroid synthesis show the characteristic features of reduced growth (dwarfism) and a reduced elongation of the hypocotyl in seedlings grown in the dark when compared to wildtype plants. By these features it is possible to select plant mutants which may have a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis. This can be confirmed if it is possible to complement the mutant phenotype by addition of brassinosteroid compounds (step (b)). Various brassinosteroid compounds are known to the person skilled in the art. They may be naturally occurring brassinosteroids or chemically synthesized analogs. The way of application of the brassinosteroid compounds to the plants is not critical. Spraying of solutions is preferred. From the identified mutants which are indeed defective in brassinosteroid synthesis, the mutated gene can be identified and isolated.

One possibility is: (i) to create a plurality of mutants by gene-tagging (e.g. by T-DNA or transposons), (ii) identify according to step (a) and (b) the mutants which are defective in brassinosteroid synthesis, (iii) to prepare a genomic library of the and (iv) to isolate the mutated gene with the help of the DNA used for tagging of the genes. This leads to the identification of the tagged mutated gene. This can subsequently be used to isolate wildtype cDNA and genomic clones using standard techniques, for example, hybridization techniques or PCR. Such an approach is in principle described in the examples, see supra.

Alternatively, the identification and isolation of the mutated gene can be carried out as follows: (i) precise genetic mapping of the mutation which allows then (ii) the

isolation of yeast artificial chromosome (YAC) clones carrying the corresponding gene on a smaller chromosome fragment, (iii) using these YAC clones to isolate corresponding cosmid clones, (iv) using these cosmid clones for the genetic complementation of the mutation, (v) identifying those cosmid clones which can complement the mutation and (vi) isolating with the help of the cosmid clone the corresponding cDNA and/or genomic sequences. This procedure is generally known as genomic walking and is well known to the person skilled in the art.

The identified and isolated genes and/or cDNAs can subsequently be characterized according to standard techniques, such as restriction mapping and sequencing. The biological activity of the encoded product may be determined by homology comparisons with known proteins, in vivo feeding assays of the mutant etc.

In a preferred embodiment the above-described process is carried out with transgenic plants showing reduced activity of the enzyme according to the invention which had been generated with the above-described nucleic acid molecules, for example, by expressing an antisense-RNA.

The described process, thus, allows to identify nucleic acid molecules which encode a protein having the same enzymatic properties as the protein according to the invention and which is, thus, able to complement a mutant defective in this protein, even though the nucleic acid molecule encoding the protein may not hybridize to the nucleic acid molecules described above.

Thus, the present invention also relates to nucleic acid molecules obtainable by the above-described process. In principle, any nucleic acid molecule encoding a protein involved in brassinosteroid synthesis or in its regulation may be identified by this method as long as its mutation leads to dwarfism and reduction of hypocotyl elongation in the dark. Preferably such nucleic acid molecules encode proteins involved in one or more enzymatic step(s) of the brassinosteroid synthesis pathway, and more preferably proteins which show the same enzymatic properties as the proteins according to the invention.

By the provision of the knowledge that plant mutants defective in brassinosteroid synthesis may be identified by the features that they display dwarfism and

reduced elongation of the hypocotyl of seeds germinating in the dark, the present invention allows to establish a simple method for identifying chemical compounds which can act like brassinosteroids in plants and which therefore may constitute potential growth factors in plants.

Thus, the present invention also provides a method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as brassinosteroids in plants comprising the steps of:

- (a) contacting a transgenic plant according to the invention which show a reduced activity of the protein according to the invention, or a mutant as identified by steps (a) and (b) of the method described above, which show a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis, with a plurality of chemical compounds; and
- (b) determining those compounds which are capable of compensating in the plants or mutants as defined in (a) the effects that resulted from defects in the brassinosteroid synthesis.

Plants used in step (a) of this method may be plants which show reduced activity of the proteins according to the invention and, thus, have a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis which leads to dwarfism and reduced elongation of the hypocotyl of seedlings germinating in the dark. Alternatively, other plant mutants may be used which had been identified as being defective in brassinosteroid synthesis since they display dwarfism and reduced elongation of the hypocotyl in the dark and can be restored to the wildtype phenotype by addition of specific brassinosteroids.

Chemical compounds which can partly or fully restore the wildtype phenotype may constitute potential growth factors for plants.

In another aspect the present invention also relates to a method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as brassinosteroids in plants comprising the steps of:

- (a) contacting germinating seeds of a plant according to the invention which show a reduced activity of the protein according to the

invention and thus a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis, or of a dwarf mutant the seedlings of which show reduced elongation of the hypocotyl in the dark and in which normal growth can be restored by addition of specific brassinosteroids, with a plurality of chemical compounds; and

- (b) determining those compounds which are capable of restoring normal growth of the hypocotyl and/or roots in the seedlings.

Furthermore, the present invention relates to a method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as inhibitors of brassinosteroids or can suppress the biological activities of brassinosteroids comprising the steps of:

- (a) contacting plant cells or plants overexpressing a nucleic acid molecule according to the invention and, thus, showing a modified brassinosteroid synthesis and the above-described physiological and/or phenotypic changes, with a plurality of chemical compounds; and
- (b) identifying those compounds which lead to a weakening of the effects which resulted from altered brassinosteroid synthesis in these cells or plants.

The present invention also relates to a method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as inhibitors of brassinosteroids or can suppress the biological activities of brassinosteroids comprising the steps of:

- (a) contacting germinating seedlings of a plant according to the invention which show reduced activity of the protein according to the invention and, thus, a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis, or of a dwarf mutant the seedlings of which show reduced elongation of the hypocotyl in the dark and in which normal growth can be restored by addition of specific brassinosteroids, with brassinosteroids which are capable of restoring normal elongation of the hypocotyl of the seedlings germinating in the dark and simultaneously with a plurality of chemical compounds; and

- (b) determining those compounds which compete with the brassinosteroids to restore normal elongation of the hypocotyl.

Inhibitors identified by the two above-described methods may prove useful as herbicides, pesticides or safeners.

Beside the above described possibilities to use the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention for the genetic engineering of plants with modified characteristics and their use to identify homologous molecules, the described nucleic acid molecules may also be used for several other applications, for example, for the identification of nucleic acid molecules which encode proteins which interact with the cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase described above. This can be achieved by assays well known in the art, for example, by use of the so-called yeast "two-hybrid system". In this system the protein encoded by the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention or a smaller part thereof is linked to the DNA-binding domain of the GAL4 transcription factor. A yeast strain expressing this fusion protein and comprising a lacZ reporter gene driven by an appropriate promoter, which is recognized by the GAL4 transcription factor, is transformed with a library of cDNAs which will express plant proteins fused to an activation domain. Thus, if a protein encoded by one of the cDNAs is able to interact with the fusion protein comprising the P450 protein, the complex is able to direct expression of the reporter gene. In this way the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention and the encoded cytochrome P450 can be used to identify proteins interacting with the cytochrome P450, such as protein kinases, protein phosphatases, NAD(P)H oxidoreductases and/or cytochrome b5 proteins which are known to interact in plants and animals with cytochrome P450 proteins.

Other methods for identifying proteins which interact with the proteins according to the invention or nucleic acid molecules encoding such molecules are, for example, the in vitro screening with the phage display system as well as filter binding assays.

Furthermore, is it possible to use the nucleic acid molecules according to the invention as molecular markers in plant breeding as well as for the generation of modified cytochrome P450 proteins, as e.g., proteins with an altered substrate specificity.

Moreover, the nucleic acid molecules and proteins according to the invention can be used for the production of teasterone in any desired recombinant organism such as bacteria, fungi, animals or plants.

Furthermore, the overexpression of nucleic acid molecules according to the invention may be used for the alteration or modification of plant/insect or in general plant/pathogene interactions. The term pathogene includes, for example, bacteria and fungi as well as protozoa.

The nucleic acid molecules according to the invention as well as the encoded proteins and the brassinosteroid compounds identified by a method according to the invention can also be used for the regulation of stem and leaf (as well as other plant organ) development, which includes the regulation of the proportion of phloem and xylem in all crops and trees, namely in those plants which are of interest in wood production.

A further possible use of the nucleic acid molecules, proteins and brassinosteroid compounds identified by a method according to the invention is the regulation of the differentiation and of the number of stomatal guard cells which may be of interest in the breeding or genetic engineering of plants with better stress tolerance, including drought, osmotic and other stresses.

Figure 1 shows the biosynthesis pathway of brassinosteroids (Fujioka et al., Biosci. Biotech. Biochem. 59 (1995), 1543-1547).

Figure 2 illustrates the effects of the *cpd* mutation on seedling development in the dark and light.

(A) In the dark the *cpd* mutant (right) exhibits short hypocotyl and open cotyledons, whereas the hypocotyl is elongated and the hook of cotyledons is closed in the wild type (left). (B) Unusual cell division and guard cell differentiation in the hypocotyl

epidermis and (C) closely spaced stomata in the cotyledon epidermis of the *cpd* mutant. In contrast to wild type (D), the length of epidermal cells is reduced in the *cpd* mutant (E) and their surface is covered by transverse cellulose microfibrils (labeled by black arrows). In comparison to wild type (F), the adaxial leaf epidermis of the *cpd* mutant (G) shows straight cell walls and duplicated stomatal structures. In the light (H) the *cpd* mutant (left) is smaller than the wild type (right), due to inhibition of longitudinal growth in all organs (close up of mutant in I). Cross sections of wild type (J) and *cpd* mutant (K) leaves show differences in the size and elongation of mesophyll cells. Comparison of the organization of phloem (p) and xylem (x) cell files in stem cross sections of wild type (L) and *cpd* mutant (M) plants. D-E, F-G, J-K and L-M are identical magnifications. Scale bars label 200 μ m in D and 100 μ m in J and L.

Figure 3 illustrates the altered patterns of gene expression in the *cpd* mutant and *CPD* overexpressing plants in the dark and light.

(A) Hybridization of RNAs prepared from wild type (left) and *cpd* mutant (right) plants, grown in media with 15 mM sucrose for 5 weeks in the dark, with *RBCS*, *CAB* and *UBI* gene probes. (B) RNAs were prepared from wild type (wt), *cpd* mutant (*cpd*) and genetically complemented *cpd* (*cpd* comp.) seedlings grown in glass jars under white light for 2 weeks and hybridized with the *RBCS*, *CAB*, alkaline peroxidase (*APE*), superoxide dismutase (*SOD*), glutathione-S-transferase (*GST*), heat-shock 70 (*HSP70*), lignin-forming peroxidase (*LPE*), chalcone synthase (*CHS*), lipoxygenase (*LOX2*), S-adenosyl-methionine synthase (*SAM*), heat-shock 18.2 (*HSP18.2*), alcohol dehydrogenase (*ADH*), and pathogenesis related *PR1*, *PR2* and *PR5* gene probes. To control an equal loading of RNA samples, the blots were hybridized with the *UBI* gene probe (data not shown). The effects of light, cytokinin and sucrose on the level of steady-state *CPD* RNA was assayed by transferring 10 days old wild type seedlings (grown in white light and in the presence of 15 mM sucrose) to media containing either 0.1% (3 mM) or 3% (90 mM) sucrose. These seedlings were further grown for 6 days in either dark (D) or light (L), with (D* and L*) or without (D and L) cytokinin (1.5 μ M 6(γ,γ -dimethylallylamino)-purine riboside) before RNA isolation.

2 2

Figure 4 shows schematically the chromosomal localization, physical structure and transcription of wild type and T-DNA tagged *CPD* alleles.

(A) Schematic genetic linkage map of *Arabidopsis* chromosome 5 (top line), showing the position of the T-DNA insertion and *cpd* mutation in relation to those of *ttg* (transparent testa glabra), *co* (constans), *hy5* (long hypocotyl) and *ASA1* (anthranilate synthase) loci. The second line shows the location of a YAC contig carrying the *CPD* gene. Schematic structure of the *CPD* gene, as well as the position of the T-DNA insertion in the *cpd* allele, are shown in the middle. The promoter of the *CPD* gene is labeled by an arrow, exons are shown as thick black bars. The structure of the T-DNA insert is compared to that of the T-DNA of *Agrobacterium* transformation vector pPCV5013Hyg. The T-DNA insertion consists of two DNA segments (T-DNA1 and T-DNA2), carrying respectively part of the octopine synthase (*ocs*) gene and the *hpt* selectable marker gene in inverse orientation, as compared to the map of pPCV5013Hyg vector. Lines above the schematic map of the *CPD* gene and below the map of T-DNA insertion indicate restriction endonuclease cleavage sites. Abbreviations: cM, centiMorgan; *ocs*, octopine synthase gene, *ocsδ*, octopine synthase gene segment, *hpt*, hygromycin phosphotransferase gene, pBR, pBR322 plasmid replication; ori, replication origin of pBR322; pg5, promoter of T-DNA; gene 5, pnos, nopaline synthase promoter, Lb and Rb, left and right border sequences of the T-DNA; B, *Bam*HI; H, *Hind*III; P, *Pst*I; R, *Eco*RI and K, *Kpn*I. (B) RNAs prepared from wild type cell suspension culture (c), wild type and *cpd* mutant seedlings (s) were hybridized with the *Pst*I-*Hind*III plant DNA-T-DNA junction fragment flanking the *hpt*-pBR segment (T-DNA2). RNAs prepared from seedlings and different organs of soil-grown plants were hybridized with the *CPD* cDNA as probe. Abbreviation: stem infl., inflorescence stems.

Figure 5 shows the genetic complementation of the *cpd* mutation.

(A) Schematic maps of the T-DNA-tagged *cpd* gene and the T-DNA of plant gene expression vector pPCV701, carrying the *CPD* cDNA driven by the *mas* 2' promoter.

*Hind*III cleavage sites are indicated by black arrows below the map of the *cpd* gene and above the map of pPCV701 expression vector. Fragments A, B and C indicate *Hind*III fragments of the wild type *CPD* gene hybridizing with the *CPD* cDNA probe. T labels the T-DNA-plant DNA junction fragment that hybridizes with the cDNA probe in the *cpd* mutant. X labels the *Hind*III fragment carrying the junction of the *mas* 2' promoter and *CPD* cDNA. Because the 5'-end of the cDNA probe is located very close to the site of T-DNA insertion in the *cpd* gene, the cDNA probe did not detect the second T-DNA- plant DNA junction fragment, carrying part of the "A" fragment linked to the T-DNA. Abbreviations: Lb and Rb, left and right borders of the T-DNA of pPCV701 expression vector, pmas, promoter of the mannopine synthase gene; pnos, nopaline synthase promoter; npt, kanamycin resistance (neomycin phosphotransferase) gene; Ag7 and Ag4, polyadenylation sequences derived from T-DNA genes 4 and 7, respectively. (B) *Left*: Southern hybridization of *Hind*III digested DNAs from wild type, *cpd* mutant and a *CPD* overexpressing complemented line with the *CPD* cDNA probe. The DNA fingerprints show the presence of the *mas* promoter-cDNA junction (X) and *cpd* specific fragments (B,C and T), as well as the absence of the wild type target site (A) in the complemented (*cpd* compl.) and *cpd* mutant lines. Other fragments detected by the cDNA probe correspond to 6 new T-DNA border fragments. Thus, the genetic segregation and DNA fingerprinting data indicate that in the complemented line tandem T-DNA copies of pPCV701 vector are present in 3 loci showing independent segregation. *Right*: RNAs were prepared from 14 days old wild type, *cpd* mutant and complemented *cpd* plants and hybridized with the *CPD* cDNA probe. (C) *Top*: Comparison of the phenotype of wild type (left) and complemented *cpd* seedlings grown in soil under white light. *Bottom*: Comparison of the leaf morphology of wild type (first 2 leaves from the left) to that of *cpd* mutant (third leaf) and *CPD* overexpressing complemented plants (three leaves at the right).

Figure 6 demonstrates the sequence homology between CYP90 and other cytochrome P450 proteins from plants and animals.

CYP90 shows the highest sequence identity (28%) with CYP88 ($GA_{12} \rightarrow GA_{53}$ gibberellin 13-hydroxylase; Winkler and Helentjaris, Plant Cell 7 (1995), 1307-1317)

from maize, but differs in several domains from other plant P450s, including CYP71B1 of *Thlaspi arvense* (23% identity, GenBank (gb) L24438), CYP76A2 of eggplant (19% identity, gb X71657) and cinnamate 4-hydroxylase CYP73 of Jerusalem artichoke (17% identity, gb Z17369). CYP90 and CYP88 differ from all other plant P450s (Frey et al., Mol. Gen. Genet. 246 (1995), 100-109) by amino acid exchanges in the conserved positions G₇₆, K₃₃₇, P₃₅₀, W₃₇₅, W₃₈₄, E₃₉₃, and F₃₉₆, as indicated below the sequence comparison. CYP90 also exhibits sequence homology to all conserved domains of animal P450s, such as CYP2B1 (gb J00719) and CYP21A2 (gb S29670), and also to the central variable region of CYP2 family (positions 135-249) which carries the substrate-binding domains SRS2 and SRS3 (Gotoh, J. Biol. Chem. 267 (1992), 83-90). The locations of conserved domains of microsomal P450s, including the membrane anchor region, proline rich-domain, as well as the O₂-, steroid-, and heme-binding domains are indicated by arrows above the aligned sequences. Identical amino acids are labeled by inverted printing.

Figure 7 shows the restoration of the *cpd* mutant phenotype to wild type by complementation with brassinosteroids.

Wild type (wt) and *cpd* mutant seedlings were grown for 5 days in the dark (left) or for 14 days in the light (right) with no steroid (-), or with 0.2×10^{-6} M of campesterol (CL), cathasterone (CT), teasterone (TE), 3-dehydrotestosterone (DT), typhasterol (TY), castasterone (CS) or brassinolide (BL).

Figure 8 shows the effect of brassinosteroids on the hypocotyl elongation of dark-grown *Arabidopsis* mutants.

Each picture shows seedlings grown for 5 days in the dark. From left to right, the first seedling was grown in the absence of steroid, the second was treated with ergosterol, the third with *epi*-castasterone and the fourth with *epi*-brassinolide. The concentration of steroids was 0.1×10^{-6} M. (Before taking the pictures the seedlings

were inspected under the microscope, which explains the greening of cotyledons in certain mutants.)

The Examples illustrate the description.

Example 1

Construction and identification of T-DNA tagged mutant impaired in the regulation of cell elongation and skotomorphogenic development

A genetic technology, using the transferred DNA (T-DNA) of *Agrobacterium tumefaciens* Ti plasmid as an insertional mutagen, was developed for induction of gene mutations by gene tagging in higher plants. Namely, tissue culture transformation of *Arabidopsis thaliana* was carried out with a modified Ti plasmid derived vector, i.e. pPCV5013Hyg, as described in Koncz et al. (Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA 86 (1989), 8467-8471), Koncz et al. (Plant Mol. Biol. 20 (1992b), 963-976) and Koncz et al. (Specialized vectors for gene tagging and expression studies. In: Plant Molecular Biology Manual Vol 2, Gelvin and Schilperoort (Eds.) , Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publ. (1994), 1-22)). This gene tagging technology was applied, using the model plant *Arabidopsis thaliana*, for generation of a collection of T-DNA insertional mutants, in order to identify mutations and corresponding genes, controlling plant development, in particular cell growth in different plant organs.

By screening for mutants defective in hypocotyl and/or root elongation during skotomorphogenesis, a recessive mutation causing constitutive photomorphogenesis and dwarfism (*cpd*) was identified. Unlike the wild type, the *cpd* mutant developed a short hypocotyl, no apical hook, open cotyledons, and extended leaf primordia in the dark (Fig. 2 A,B). As compared to wildtype, the length of epidermal cell files was reduced at least 5-fold in the hypocotyl, but decreased only by 20 to 50% in the root of mutant seedlings. Epidermal cells of the mutant hypocotyl were decorated by thick transverse files of cellulose microfibrils (Fig. 2 D,E) and showed perpendicular divisions leading to differentiation of stomatal guard cells (Fig. 2B). Dense stomata and trichomes characteristic for leaves were also observed on the epidermis of mutant cotyledons (Fig. 2 C). During growth for 5 weeks in the dark the mutant developed numerous rosette leaves, while wild type seedlings opened their

cotyledons without leaf expansion under these conditions (Fig. 3 A). These phenotypic traits indicated a derepression of photomorphogenesis and de-etiolation in the dark-grown *cpd* mutant. Hybridization of steady-state RNAs prepared from these seedlings, using an ubiquitin (*UBI*) gene probe as an internal control, confirmed that morphological signs of de-etiolation in the mutant were accompanied by an increase in the expression of light-regulated genes, coding for the small subunit of ribulose 1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase (RBCS) and the chlorophyll a/b-binding protein (CAB, Fig. 3 A).

When grown in soil under white light, the size of *cpd* mutant plants was 20 to 30-fold smaller than that of the same age wild type plants. Exposure to light induced greening and chloroplast differentiation in the periderm of mutant roots (data not shown) and resulted in a further inhibition of cell elongation, leading to an overall reduction of the length of petioles, leaves, inflorescence-stems and flower organs (Fig. 2 H,I). Histological analysis showed that in the round-shape epinastic mutant leaves the number of longitudinal mesophyll cell files was reduced and the palisade cells failed to elongate (Fig. 2 J,K). The cell walls were straightened in the adaxial leaf epidermis of the mutant, which displayed an amplification and duplication of stomatal guard cells (Fig. 2 F,G). Stem cross sections showed an unequal division of cambium, producing extranumerary phloem cell files at the expense of xylem cells in the mutant (Fig. 2 L,M). The *cpd* mutant was viable in soil and produced eggs and pollen of wild type size. However, the mutant did not set seeds because its pollen failed to elongate during germination, resulting in male sterility.

Example 2

Genetic analysis of the *cpd* mutation

For trisomic analysis and linkage mapping a *cpd*/+ line was crossed with the tester lines as described (Koncz et al. (1992b), loc. cit.) and hygromycin resistant F1 hybrids were selected by germinating seeds in MSAR medium (Koncz et al. (1994), loc. cit.).

After outcrossing of the mutant with wild type, the *cpd* mutation co-segregated with a single T-DNA insertion, carrying a hygromycin resistance (*hpt*) marker gene from the *Agrobacterium* transformation vector pPCV5013Hyg (Koncz et al. (1989), loc. cit.). The *cpd* mutation and the T-DNA insertion were mapped to chromosome 5-14.3 (Fig. 4 A), using trisomic testers and the *ttg* marker of chromosome 5 in repulsion as described in the following.

After outcrossing of the *cpd* mutant with wild type, 8 F2 families yielded an offspring of 1297 wild type and 437 dwarf plants (2.97:1), fitting (χ^2 0.037, homogeneity: 2,599; $P=0.85$) the expected 3:1 ratio for monogenic segregation of the recessive *cpd* mutation. From these F2 families, 5383 mutants were tested on hygromycin and all displayed resistance, indicating a tight linkage between the T-DNA insertion and the *cpd* mutation.

In contrast to other trisomic hybrids, segregating the mutation at a ratio of 3:1, the chromosome 5 trisomic tester T31 produced an aberrant F2 ratio of 588 wild type (336 resistant and 252 sensitive to hygromycin) and 60 *cpd* mutant (all hygromycin resistant) plants. The ratios of wild type to mutant (9.8:1) and hygromycin resistant to sensitive (1.57:1) progeny matched with the ratios expected for synteny ($\geq 8:1$ and between 1.25:1 and 2.41:1, respectively).

The T-DNA insert and the *cpd* mutation were simultaneously mapped, using the *ttg* marker of chromosome 5 in repulsion. For determination of the *cpd-ttg* map distance, two mapping populations were raised, one including plants grown in soil and another using seedlings germinated in MSAR medium and tested in the presence of 15 $\mu\text{g/ml}$ hygromycin. The soil-grown population was scored for the hairless *ttg* and dwarf *cpd* phenotypes in F2 and seeds from fertile plants were carried to full-F3 analysis. By labeling *cpd* as "a" and *ttg* as "b", the actual scores in the soil-grown population were 1054 AaBb, 685 aaB. (424 aaBB and 261 aaBb by extrapolation), 387 AAbb, 261 aAbb, 248 AaBB, 251 AABb, 21 AABB and 25 aabb. Progeny analysis showed that the AaBb, aAbb, AaBB and aabb classes were hygromycin resistant, in contrast to the hygromycin sensitive classes AAbb, AABb and AABB. In the population scored on MSAR medium with controlled seed germination the data were 815 AaB., 512 aaB., 193 AAB., 300 AAbb, 159 aAbb and 17 aabb. Both mapping populations yielded identical frequencies for the double recombinant fraction (*cpd-ttg*). The

recombination frequencies and derived map distances were calculated by the maximum likelihood method as described (Koncz et al., Methods in Arabidopsis Research ; Singapore, World Scientific, 1992a). From these data the smaller map distance, corrected for the error resulting from uneven seed germination in soil, was accepted, resulting in 21.18 ± 0.86 cM for the *cpd*(5-14.3)-*ttg*(5-35.5) interval. By scoring 1520 recombinant chromosomes, no crossing-over between the T-DNA-encoded hygromycin resistance marker and the *cpd* mutation was found, indicating that the T-DNA insertion was located in the *cpd* locus.

The physical map of the T-DNA-tagged locus was determined by DNA hybridization and showed that the *cpd* mutant contained a T-DNA insert of 4.8 kb, which underwent internal rearrangements (Fig. 4 A).

Example 3

Isolation of the T-DNA tagged locus as well as wildtype cDNAs and genomic DNAs of the *cpd* locus

To isolate the T-DNA-tagged locus, a genomic DNA library was constructed by ligation of *cpd* DNA, digested partially by *Mbo*I, into the *Bam*HI site of the λ EMBL3 vector (Sambrook et al. (1989), loc. cit.). The T-DNA-tagged locus was isolated by constructing a genomic DNA library from the *cpd* mutant and mapped by hybridization with T-DNA derived probes (Fig. 4 A).

The T-DNA/plant DNA insert junctions were subcloned, sequenced and used as probes to determine precisely the genomic location of the T-DNA insertion by isolation of *Arabidopsis* YAC (yeast artificial chromosome) clones. The YAC clones (Fig. 4 A) overlapped with the *ASA1* (anthranilate synthase, chr5-14.7) and *hy5* (long hypocotyl locus, chr5-14.8) region of chromosome 5 (R. Schmidt, unpublished; Hauge et al., Plant J. 3 (1993), 745-754), thus matching the map position (chr5-14.3) determined for the T-DNA-tagged *cpd* mutation by genetic linkage analysis.

Plant DNA sequences flanking the *hpt*-pBR segment of T-DNA (Fig. 4 A) hybridized with a mRNA of 1.7 kb present in wildtype seedlings and cell suspension cultures, but failed to detect any transcript in the *cpd* mutant (Fig. 4 B).

Following the physical mapping of the λ EMBL3 clones, the T-DNA-plant DNA junction fragments (flanked by *Bam*HI and *Hind*III sites in the plant DNA, Fig. 4 A) were used as probes for the isolation of 4 genomic and 4 cDNA clones from wildtype *Arabidopsis* λ EMBL4 genomic and λ gt10 cDNA libraries. To identify yeast artificial chromosome clones containing the *CPD* locus, wildtype *Arabidopsis* YAC libraries were screened by hybridization (Koncz et al. (1992b), loc. cit.), using the ocs T-DNA-plant DNA junction fragment (*Bam*HI-*Eco*RI fragment in Fig. 4A) as a probe. These clones were mapped and their fragments were subcloned and sequenced, in order to characterize the *CPD* cDNA (EMBL data base: accession number X87367; Seq ID No. 1) and gene (EMBL data base: accession number X87368; Seq ID No. 3). The 5'-end of the *CPD* transcript of 1735 bases was mapped 166 bp upstream of the ATG codon (data not shown), whereas the polyadenylation signal was located 104 nucleotides downstream of the stop codon in the 3'-UTR of 131 bases.

In support of the RNA hybridization data, nucleotide sequence comparison of the T-DNA insert junctions with wildtype cDNA and genomic DNA sequences showed that the T-DNA was inserted 10 bp 3'-downstream of the ATG start codon of a gene, preventing the transcription of its coding region.

DNA analyses and cloning, screening of lambda phage libraries, DNA and RNA filter hybridizations and sequencing of double-stranded DNA templates were performed using standard molecular techniques (Sambrook et al. (1989), loc. cit.). For hybridization of RNA blots, the following cDNA probes were used: *RBCS* (EST ATTS0402, GenBank (gb): X13611), *CAB140* (Ohio Arabidopsis Stock Center (OASC) 38A1T7, gb A29280), alkaline peroxidase (EST ATTS0366, gb P24102), nonchloroplastic *SOD* (OASC 2G11T7P), *GST2* (gb L11601), *HSP70* (gb M23108), lignin-forming peroxidase (EST ATTS0592, gb P11965), chalcone synthase (Trezzi et al., Plant Mol. Biol. 21 (1993), 385-389), lipoxygenase (*Lox2*, gb L23968), S-adenosyl-methionine synthase (OASC 40G2T7, gb P23686), *Hsp18.2* (gb X17295), *ADH* (gb M12196), *PR1*, *PR2* and *PR5* (Uknes et al., Plant Cell 4 (1992), 645-656).

The RNA blot shown in Fig. 4 B was hybridized with plant DNA sequences flanking the *hpt*-pBR segment of the T-DNA (*Pst*I-*Hind*III fragment in Fig. 4 A).

Example 4

Analysis of the cpd cDNAs and genomic clones

The analysis of *CPD* DNAs and derived protein sequences was performed using the GCG and BLAST computer programs (Deveraux et al., Nucl. Acids Res. 12 (1984), 387-395; Altschul et al., J. Mol. Biol. 215 (1990), 403-410), as well as P450 sequence compilations (Gotoh, J. Biol. Chem. 267 (1992), 83-90; Nelson et al., DNA 12 (1993), 1-51; Frey et al., Mol. Gen. Genet. 246 (1995), 100-109).

DNA sequence analysis revealed that the *CPD* gene (Seq ID No. 3) consists of 8 exons (Fig. 4 A) with consensus splice sites at the exon-intron boundaries. The *CPD* cDNA (Seq ID No. 1) showed over 90% homology with expressed sequence tags [e.g. ESTs EMBL Z29017 and GenBank T43151] from several organ specific *Arabidopsis* cDNA libraries, indicating that the *CPD* transcript is ubiquitous. Hybridization analysis with the cDNA probe (Fig. 4 B) indeed showed that the levels of steady-state *CPD* mRNA were comparable in roots, leaves and flowers, but considerably lower in inflorescence-stems and green siliques (fruits). The expression of the *CPD* gene was found to be modulated by external signals, such as light, cytokinin growth factor and sucrose provided as carbon source. The levels of *CPD* mRNA were elevated in dark-grown wild type seedlings by either increasing the sucrose content of the media (from 3mM to 90 mM) or by light at low concentrations of sucrose, but decreased by combined cytokinin and sucrose treatments, particularly in the light (Fig. 3 B).

Translation of the *CPD* cDNA defined a coding region of 472 codons (Seq ID No. 2) for a protein of 53,785 Da, in the following referred to as CYP90. The deduced amino acid sequence of this protein detected homology in the database with the conserved N-terminal membrane-anchoring, proline-rich, oxygen and heme binding domains of microsomal cytochrome P450s (Fig. 6); 50 to 90% sequence identity with conserved P450 domains defined by Nebert and Gonzalez (Ann. Rev. Biochem. 56 (1987), 945-993). The *CPD* gene encoded protein thus appeared to possess all functionally important domains of P450 monooxygenases (Pan et al., J. Biol. Chem. 270 (1995), 8487-8494). In addition, the sequence comparison also indicated a homology

between CYP90 and specific domains of steroid hydroxylases. Members of the CYP2 family, including the rat testosterone-16 α -hydroxylase (CYP2B1; 24% identity; Fujii-Kuriyama et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 79 (1982), 2793-2797) showed thus sequence similarity with CYP90 in their central variable region (positions 135-249, Fig. 6), carrying the steroid substrate-binding domains SRS2 and SRS3 (Gotoh, (1992), loc. cit.). Moreover, in the CYP21 family, represented by the human progesterone-21-hydroxylase (CYP21A2; 19% identity; White et al., Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. 83 (1986), 5111-5115), the positions of introns 7 and 8 corresponded to those of introns 3 and 5 in the *CPD* gene, suggesting a significant evolutionary relationship (Nelson et al., (1993), loc. cit.). Nonetheless, because its overall sequence identity with other P450s was less than 40%, the *CPD* gene product was assigned to a novel P450 family, CYP90, clustering on the evolutionary tree with CYP85 from tomato, CYP87 from sunflower (both unpublished) and CYP88 from maize (Winkler and Helentjaris, Plant Cell 7 (1995), 1307-1317; P450 Nomenclature Committee, D. Nelson, personal comm.).

Example 5

Complementation of the *cpd* mutation

To demonstrate that the T-DNA insertion was indeed responsible for the *cpd* mutation, the coding region of the longest wildtype *CPD* cDNA (extending 47 bp upstream of the ATG codon) was cloned in the *Bam*HI-site of plant gene expression vector pPCV701, conjugated from *E.coli* to *Agrobacterium*, and transformed into the homozygous *cpd* mutant by *Agrobacterium*-mediated *Arabidopsis* transformation as described (Koncz et al. (1994), loc. cit.). The cDNA was expressed in the homozygous *cpd* mutant under the control of the auxin-regulated mannopine synthase (*mas*) 2' promoter (Fig. 5 A; Koncz et al. (1994), loc. cit.). Transgenic plants, selected and regenerated with the aid of a kanamycin resistance gene carried by the pPCV701 vector, were all wildtype and fertile, demonstrating genetic complementation of the *cpd* mutation. Kanamycin resistant progeny of many

34

complemented lines developed more expanded leaves and inflorescence branches than the wild type. One such complemented *cpd* line (Fig. 5 C) contained at least 3 independently segregating pPCV701 T-DNA insertions, since it yielded 268 kanamycin resistant wildtype and 4 kanamycin sensitive *cpd* mutant progeny. DNA fingerprinting confirmed the presence of multiple pPCV701 T-DNA insertions in this complemented line which produced a considerably higher amount of *CPD* transcript from the *mas 2'* promoter driven cDNA copies than the wild type from the single copy *CPD* gene (Fig. 5 B).

Example 6

Effects of overexpression of a *cpd* cDNA

In contrast to the dark-grown *cpd* mutant (Fig. 3 A), in light-grown plants neither the absence nor the overexpression of *CPD* transcript affected the level of steady-state RNAs of light-regulated *RBCS* and *CAB* genes (Fig. 3 B). The transcript levels of chalcone synthase (*CHS*), alcohol dehydrogenase (*ADH*), lipoxygenase (*LOX2*), S-adenosyl-methionine synthase (*SAM*) and heat shock 18.2 (*Hsp18.2*) genes were elevated in the *cpd* mutant, whereas the mRNA levels of other stress-regulated genes, such as alkaline peroxidase (*APE*), superoxide dismutase (*SOD*), glutathione-S-transferase (*GST*), heat shock 70 (*HSP70*) or lignin forming peroxidase (*LPE*), were comparable in the *cpd* mutant, wildtype and *CPD* overexpressing plants. The expression of the pathogenesis related genes *PR1*, 2 and 5 were remarkably low in the *cpd* mutant. However, overexpression of the *CPD* cDNA resulted in a significant induction of these *PR* genes in the complemented lines overexpressing *cpd*.

Example 7

Complementation of *cpd* mutants with brassinosteroids and other plant growth factors

The above described sequence homology data were not sufficient to predict unambiguously the substrate specificity of CYP90 (Nelson et al. (1993), loc. cit.). Therefore, the elongation response of the *cpd* mutant to all plant growth factors, whose synthesis could involve P450 enzymes, was tested.

Plant growth factors including auxins (indole-3-acetic acid, α -naphthaleneacetic acid, 2,4-dichloro-phenoxyacetic acid), cytokinins (6-benzyl-aminopurine, 6-furfurylaminopurine, 6-(γ,γ -dimethylallylamino)-purine riboside), abscisic acid, salicylic acid, methyl-jasmonate, as well as retinoic acid derivatives (vitamin A aldehyde, 9-*cis*-retinal, 13-*cis*-retinal, *trans*-retinoic acid, 13-*cis*-retinoic acid and retinol) were used at final concentrations of 0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 0.5 or 1 μ M, whereas gibberellins (gibberellic acid GA3, GA4, GA7 and GA13) were applied at 0.1, 1, 10, and 100 μ M concentrations in MSAR seed germination media.

Brassinosteroids as listed in Fig. 1 and *epi*-isomers of teasterone, typhasterol, castasterone and brassinolide were obtained from A. Sakurai and S. Fujioka (Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN), Japan) and G. Adam (Institute for Plant Biochemistry, Halle, Germany). BRs were tested at similar concentrations (0.005, 0.01, 0.05, 0.1, 0.5 and 1 μ M) in MSAR media used for seed germination under aseptic conditions (Koncz et al. (1994), loc. cit.). The bioassays were evaluated after 1, 2, 5 and 10 days of germination by measurement of the length of hypocotyls and roots, as well as by visual inspection and photography of seedlings. Mutant plants grown in soil were sprayed with 0.1 or 1 μ M aqueous solutions of castasterone or brassinolide.

Histological analyses were performed according to standard procedures (Feder and O'Brien, Am. J. Bot. 55 (1968), 123-142). Tissues were fixed in formalin:acetic acid:ethanol (90:5:5), embedded in 2-hydroxyethyl methacrylate, sectioned at 10 μ m using a rotary microtome, and stained by toluidine-blue. To prepare contact imprints,

seedlings were placed in 3% molten agarose and carefully removed from the solidified carrier before taking pictures.

In these bioassays auxins, gibberellins, cytokinins, abscisic acid, ethylene, methyl-jasmonate, salicylic acid and different retinoid acid derivatives failed to promote the hypocotyl elongation of the *cpd* mutant grown in the dark or light (data not shown). However, brassinolide, an ecdysone-like plant steroid (used at concentrations of 0.005 to 1×10^{-6} M), was found to restore cell elongation in the hypocotyl, leaves and petioles of *cpd* mutant seedlings in both dark and light. Brassinolide treatment also restored the male fertility of the mutant, allowing the production of homozygous seeds.

When grown in the presence of C23-hydroxylated brassinosteroid (BR) precursors (0.1 to 1×10^{-6} M) of brassinolide, such as teasterone, 3-dehydroteasterone, typhasterol, and castasterone (Fujioka et al., Biosci. Biotech. Biochem. 59 (1995), 1543-1547), the *cpd* mutant was also indistinguishable from wild type in both dark and light (Fig. 7). However, cathasterone and its precursor campesterol (as well as campestanol, 6 α -hydroxycampestanol and 6-oxocampestanol, Δ^{22} -6-oxocampestanol and 22 α ,23 α -epoxy-6-oxocampestanol, data not shown), which do not carry hydroxyl moiety at the C23 position, did not alter the *cpd* phenotype, suggesting a deficiency of cathasterone C23-hydroxylation to teasterone in the *cpd* mutant. From the synthetic [22*R*,23*R*,24*R*]-derivatives of BRs (Adam and Marquardt, (1986), loc. cit.), *epi*-teasterone was found to be inactive, whereas *epi*-castasterone and *epi*-brassinolide rescued the *cpd* phenotype as well as their [22*R*,23*R*,24*S*]-stereoisomers.

Remarkably, the hypocotyl elongation response of wildtype seedlings was unaffected by brassinosteroids in the dark (Fig. 7), indicating a possible saturation of this growth response. In contrast, treatments of wildtype seedlings with castasterone and brassinolide in the light promoted hypocotyl elongation (albeit with different efficiencies). When applied at higher concentrations (0.1 to 1×10^{-6} M), castasterone and brassinolide (as well as their *epi*-stereoisomers, but not other BRs precursors) caused aberrant leaf expansion, epinasty, senescence and retarded development in both wild type and mutant plants grown in the light (Fig. 7).

Example 8

Identification of other mutants affected in brassin steroid responses

Physiological data indicate that the biosynthesis of gibberellins and steroids involve common precursors (Davies, Plant hormones and their role in plant growth and development (1987), Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publ.) and that BRs stimulate ethylene biosynthesis in the light (Mandava (1988), loc. cit.). Nonetheless, mutants affected in ethylene production (*eto1*), gibberellin biosynthesis (*ga*) and perception (*gai*) do not respond to BRs in the dark, and BRs promote only a weak hypocotyl elongation response in the ethylene resistant *etr1* mutant. Thus, mutants affected in ethylene, gibberellin and BR responses can clearly be distinguished. The BR-bioassays performed with *cpd* mutant and wild type *Arabidopsis* seedlings in the dark show that BR-deficiency can result in a short hypocotyl phenotype, although BRs do not stimulate hypocotyl elongation in the wildtype. Mutants deficient in BR biosynthesis are expected therefore to develop short hypocotyls, which should be restored to wildtype by brassinolide and BR precursors. One can also predict that mutants defective in BR-perception and/or signaling will show short hypocotyl and a partial or complete insensitivity to BRs.

The de-etiolated mutant *det2* appears to be a BR biosynthetic mutant. The *DET2* gene codes for a homolog of animal steroid-5 α -reductases which is probably required for the conversion of campesterol to campestanol in the first step of brassinolide biosynthesis (Li, J., P. Nagpal, V. Vitart and J. Chory, personal com.). In other de-etiolated and constitutive photomorphogenic mutants, such as *det1*, *cop1-16*, *fus4*, *fus5*, *fus6*, *fus7*, *fus8*, *fus9*, *fus11*, and *fus12*, BRs stimulate hypocotyl elongation only in the dark. The *cop1-13* mutant, which produces no COP1 protein (McNellis et al., Plant Cell 6 (1994), 487-500), is apparently insensitive to BRs. In contrast, the less severe *cop1-16* mutant (Miséra et al., Mol. Gen. Genet. 244 (1994), 242-252; McNellis et al. (1994) loc. cit.), synthesizing an immunologically detectable amount of mutant COP1 protein, responds to BRs by hypocotyl growth. The *fus6* mutant displays similar allelic differences, whereas the *det3* mutant shows a complete

insensitivity to BRs. It is therefore possible that these mutations affect regulatory functions involved in BR perception and/or signaling.

The effect of castasterone and brassinolide (and their *epi*-isomers) on different *Arabidopsis* mutants impaired in hypocotyl elongation was similarly tested. To avoid complexity resulting from negative regulation of the hypocotyl elongation by light, the mutants were germinated in the presence or absence of BRs in the dark and their hypocotyl growth was compared to that of untreated and ergosterol-treated seedlings as controls (Fig. 8). Mutants in gibberellin biosynthesis (*ga5*) or perception (*gai*), showing dwarfism and inhibition of hypocotyl and/or epicotyl growth in the light (Finkelstein and Zeveaart, in : *Arabidopsis* (1994), Meyerowitz and Somerville (Eds.) Cold spring Harbor Laboratory Press; Cold spring Harbor, N.Y., 523-553), developed similar or shorter hypocotyls as the wild type, but did not respond to BRs by significant hypocotyl elongation (more than 20%) in the dark. The inhibition of hypocotyl growth in the dark-grown ethylene overproducing mutant *eto1* (Ecker, Science. 268 (1995), 667-675) was also unaffected by BRs. In contrast, BR-treatments stimulated the rate of hypocotyl elongation by 50 to 80% in the ethylene resistant mutant *etr1* (Ecker (1995), loc. cit.). The hypocotyl elongation of the auxin/ethylene resistant *axr2* mutant (Estelle and Klee, in : *Arabidopsis* (1994), Meyerowitz and Somerville (Eds.) Cold spring Harbor Laboratory Press; Cold spring Harbor, N.Y., 555-578) was also increased 2 to 3-fold by BRs, which promoted the enlargement of cotyledons, but inhibited the root growth of *axr2* seedlings. The wild type and the *ga5*, *gai1*, *eto1*, *etr1*, and *axr2* mutants displayed comparable hypocotyl elongation (but different epicotyl/stem growth) responses to BRs in the light.

As was observed for the *cpd* mutant, castasterone and brassinolide restored the phenotype of the *dim* mutant (Takahashi et al., Genes Dev. 9 (1995), 97-107) to wild type in the dark, as well as in the light (data not shown). In contrast, the hypocotyl elongation of *det1*, *cop1-16*, *fus4*, *fus5*, *fus6*, *fus7*, *fus8*, *fus9*, *fus11*, and *fus12* mutants (Chory and Susek, in : *Arabidopsis* (1994), Meyerowitz and Somerville (Eds.) Cold spring Harbor Laboratory Press; Cold spring Harbor, N.Y., 579-614; Deng, Cell 76 (1994), 423-426; Miséra et al. (1994), loc. cit.) was stimulated 3 to 10-

fold by BRs only in the dark. BRs inhibited the elongation of roots in these mutants. BRs also stimulated the cell enlargement and decreased the accumulation of anthocyanins in the cotyledons of *det1* and *fus9* mutants. In comparison to their alleles, the *cop1-13* and *fus6-G* mutants showed no, or respectively a minimal (10 to 20%), hypocotyl elongation response to castasterone and brassinolide, whereas the *det3* mutant (Chory and Susek (1994), loc. cit.) was found to be completely insensitive to Brs.

The data presented by the present application clearly provide evidence that brassinosteroids are of crucial importance for plant growth and development.

Since their discovery (Grove et al., Nature 281 (1979), 216-217), brassinosteroids (BRs) have been considered to be nonessential plant hormones, because their concentration is extremely low in most plant species and their action spectrum is redundant with those of ubiquitous growth factors auxin, gibberellin, ethylene and cytokinin. A major argument supporting this view is that BRs are inactive in hypocotyl elongation assays performed in the dark, which are used as standard tests to monitor the activity of photoreceptors and phytohormones controlling cell elongation (for review see Davies (1987), loc. cit.; Kendrick and Kronenberg, Photomorphogenesis in plants; Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publ. (1994)). The data described in the present application clearly undermine this argument, since they demonstrate that the phenotype of a hypocotyl elongation mutant can be restored to wild type by brassinolide and its precursors, but not by other known plant growth factors. The BR-precursor feeding experiments suggest that the hypocotyl elongation defect in the *cpd* mutant results from a deficiency in brassinolide biosynthesis.

Brassinolide has been observed in many plant species to stimulate the longitudinal arrangement of cortical microtubuli and cellulose microfilaments, leaf unrolling, xylem differentiation and hypocotyl elongation in the light. Brassinolide is also reported to inhibit root elongation, radial growth of the stem, anthocyanin synthesis, and de-etiolation (Mandava (1988), loc. cit.). Phenotypic traits of the *cpd* mutant - such as the inhibition of longitudinal cell elongation in most organs, the transverse arrangement of cellulose microfilaments on the surface of epidermal cells, the inhibition of leaf unrolling and xylem differentiation, and the induction of de-etiolation in the dark - are

consistent with a phenotype expected for a mutant in brassinolide synthesis. In addition, the conservation of exon-intron boundaries between the *CPD* gene and CYP21 gene family of progesterone side-chain hydroxylases, the homology of the CYP90 protein with all conserved domains of functional P450 monooxygenases, and the similarity of CYP90 domains with the substrate binding regions of CYP2 testosterone hydroxylases also suggest that the *CPD* gene may code for a cytochrome P450 steroid hydroxylase.

Cytochrome P450s are known to use a wide range of artificial substrates *in vitro*, but perform well-defined stereo-specific reactions *in vivo*. Because their substrate specificity can be altered by mutations affecting the substrate binding domains, the specificity of P450 enzymes can only be determined by *in vivo* feeding experiments with labeled substrates (Nebert and Gonzalez (1987), loc. cit.). Because it usually cannot be excluded that multiple cytochrome P450s contribute to a given metabolic conversion *in vivo*, such an analysis requires either the overexpression of cytochrome P450s in transgenic organisms, or mutants deficient in particular P450s. The *cpd* mutant and *CPD* overexpressing transgenic plants therefore provide a suitable material to confirm the requirement of CYP90 for C23-hydroxylation of cathasterone in brassinolide biosynthesis (Fujioka et al. (1995), loc. cit.).

The *cpd* and *det2* mutations result in similar phenotypic traits, including the induction of de-etiolation and expression of light-induced *RBCS* and *CAB* genes in the dark. Thus, *cpd* can be considered to be a new type of *det* mutation. Genetic analyses of *det1hy* double mutants suggest that *det1* and *det2* are epistatic to the *hy* mutations of photoreceptors. Therefore, *det1* and *det2* have been proposed to act in parallel light signaling pathways as negative regulators of de-etiolation (Chory and Susek (1994), loc. cit.). In the *det1* pathway, the products of *DET1*, *COP1*, and some *FUS* genes are thought to function as nuclear repressors of light-regulated genes in the dark (Deng (1994), loc. cit.); Quail et al., Science 268 (1995), 675-680). Now, the putative *det2* light signaling pathway (Chory and Susek (1994), loc. cit.) appears to be a brassinosteroid pathway, because *det2* as well as *cpd* and *dim* mutants are restored to wild type by BRs. This is consistent with data indicating that BRs inhibit de-etiolation in the dark (Mandava (1988), loc. cit.). Our data also show that the *cpd* mutation results in the activation of stress-regulated chalcone synthase (*CHS*),

alcohol dehydrogenase, heat-shock 18.2, lipoxygenase, S-adenosyl-methionine synthase genes in the light. This correlates with the observations showing that BRs suppress anthocyanin synthesis (i.e. controlled by *CHS*; Mandava (1988), loc. cit.) and that the *CHS* gene is also induced in the *det2* mutant (Chory et al., Plant Cell 3 (1991), 445-459). The *CPD* function (and thus the *det2*/BR-pathway) appears therefore to negatively regulate stress signaling, possibly via the modulation of lipoxygenase involved in the generation of lipid hydroperoxide signals (i.e. jasmonate), which are known to control defense and stress responses in plants (Farmer, Plant Mol. Biol. 26 (1994), 1423-1437). Cytokinin treatment of wild type *Arabidopsis* has been observed to result in a phenocopy of the *det2* mutation (Chory et al., Plant Physiol. 104 (1994), 339-347). In agreement, our data show that the transcription of the *CPD* gene is downregulated by cytokinin, which may thus control BR-biosynthesis. The expression of the *CPD* gene is also modulated by light and the availability of carbon source (e.g. sucrose), suggesting complex regulatory interactions between light and BR signaling. It is therefore possible that the *cpd* and *det2* mutations only indirectly affect the expression of light-regulated genes (e.g. through the regulation of stress responses). Studies of the *dim* mutant indicate that inhibition of the hypocotyl elongation may not influence the expression of light-induced *RBCS*, *CAB* and *CHS* genes in the dark (Takahashi et al. (1995), loc. cit.). This is intriguing, because the phenotypic traits of the *dim* mutant are nearly identical with those of the *cpd* and *det2* mutants, and our precursor feeding experiments suggest that *dim* causes a deficiency before typhasterol in BR-biosynthesis (unpublished). A comparative analysis of *det2*, *cpd*, and *dim* mutants, including their combinations with *hy* loci, is therefore necessary to clarify how the regulation of light-induced genes is affected by brassinolide and/or its brassinosteroid precursors.

Unlike *det2*, the *dim* mutation has been proposed to control cell elongation by specific regulation of the tubulin *TUB1* gene expression (Takahashi et al. (1995), loc. cit.). In fact, the available genetic data do not prove that the signaling pathways identified by the *det1* and *det2* mutations are exclusively involved in light signaling (Millar et al., Ann. Rev. Genet. 28 (1994), 325-349). Therefore, *DET*, *COP*, *FUS*, and *CPD* genes can also be considered to act as positive regulators of cell elongation, because their mutations result in the inhibition of hypocotyl elongation in the dark. The fact, that

BRs can compensate the cell elongation defects caused by the *det1*, *cop1* and *fus* mutations suggests a close interaction between the *det1* and *det2* pathways, as proposed by the genetic model (Chory and Susek (1994), loc. cit.). BR-insensitivity of the *cop1-13* mutant may in fact point to a possible involvement of the COP1 WD-protein (Deng et al., Cell 71 (1992), 791-801) in BR-responses.

43

SEQUENCE LISTING

(1) GENERAL INFORMATION:

(i) APPLICANT:

- (A) NAME: Max-Planck-Gesellschaft zur Foerderung der
Wissenschaften e.V.
- (B) STREET: none
- (C) CITY: BERLIN
- (E) COUNTRY: DE
- (F) POSTAL CODE (ZIP): none

- (ii) TITLE OF INVENTION: Nucleic acid molecules encoding cytochrome
P450-type proteins involved in the brassinosteroid
synthesis in plants

- (iii) NUMBER OF SEQUENCES: 4

(iv) COMPUTER READABLE FORM:

- (A) MEDIUM TYPE: Floppy disk
- (B) COMPUTER: IBM PC compatible
- (C) OPERATING SYSTEM: PC-DOS/MS-DOS
- (D) SOFTWARE: PatentIn Release #1.0, Version #1.30 (EPO)

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 1:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

- (A) LENGTH: 1608 base pairs
- (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
- (C) STRANDEDNESS: double
- (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

- (ii) MOLECULE TYPE: cDNA to mRNA

- (iii) HYPOTHETICAL: NO

- (iv) ANTI-SENSE: NO

(vi) ORIGINAL SOURCE:

- (A) ORGANISM: A. thaliana

(vii) IMMEDIATE SOURCE:

- (A) LIBRARY: lambda gt10
- (B) CLONE: C204

(ix) FEATURE:

- (A) NAME/KEY: CDS
- (B) LOCATION: 48..1466

44

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 1:

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5 10 15		
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Leu Leu Arg Arg Thr Arg Tyr Arg Arg Met Gly Leu Pro Pro Gly Ser		
20 25 30 35		
CTT GGT CTC CCT CTG ATA GGA GAG ACT TTT CAG CTG ATC GGA GCT TAC	200	
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40 45 50		
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Lys Thr Glu Asn Pro Glu Pro Phe Ile Asp Glu Arg Val Ala Arg Tyr		
55 60 65		
GGT TCG GTT TTC ATG ACG CAT CTT TTT GGT GAA CCG ACG ATT TTC TCA	296	
Gly Ser Val Phe Met Thr His Leu Phe Gly Glu Pro Thr Ile Phe Ser		
70 75 80		
GCT GAC CCG GAA ACG AAC CGG TTT GTT CTT CAG AAC GAA GGG AAG CTT	344	
Ala Asp Pro Glu Thr Asn Arg Phe Val Leu Gln Asn Glu Gly Lys Leu		
85 90 95		
TTT GAG TGT TCT TAT CCT GCT TCC ATT TGT AAC CTT TTG GGG AAA CAC	392	
Phe Glu Cys Ser Tyr Pro Ala Ser Ile Cys Asn Leu Leu Gly Lys His		
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TCT CTC CTT CTT ATG AAA GGT TCT TTG CAT AAA CGT ATG CAC TCT CTC	440	
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120 125 130		
ACC ATG AGC TTT GCT AAT TCT TCA ATC ATT AAA GAC CAT CTC ATG CTT	488	
Thr Met Ser Phe Ala Asn Ser Ser Ile Ile Lys Asp His Leu Met Leu		
135 140 145		
GAT ATT GAC CGG TTA GTC CGG TTT AAT CTT GAT TCT TGG TCT TCT CGT	536	
Asp Ile Asp Arg Leu Val Arg Phe Asn Leu Asp Ser Trp Ser Ser Arg		
150 155 160		
GTT CTC CTC ATG GAA GAA GCC AAA AAG ATA ACG TTT GAG CTA ACG GTG	584	
Val Leu Leu Met Glu Glu Ala Lys Lys Ile Thr Phe Glu Leu Thr Val		
165 170 175		
AAG CAG TTG ATG AGC TTT GAT CCA GGG GAA TGG AGT GAG AGT TTA AGG	632	
Lys Gln Leu Met Ser Phe Asp Pro Gly Glu Trp Ser Glu Ser Leu Arg		
180 185 190 195		

45

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Lys Glu Tyr Leu Leu Val Ile Glu Gly Phe Phe Ser Leu Pro Leu Pro	
200 205 210	
CTC TTC TCC ACC ACT TAC CGC AAA GCC ATC CAA GCG CGG AGG AAG GTG	728
Leu Phe Ser Thr Thr Tyr Arg Lys Ala Ile Gln Ala Arg Arg Lys Val	
215 220 225	
GCG GAG GCG TTG ACG GTC CTC GTC ATG AAA AGG AGG GAG GAG GAG GAA	776
Ala Glu Ala Leu Thr Val Val Val Met Lys Arg Arg Glu Glu Glu Glu	
230 235 240	
GAA GGA GCG GAG AGA AAG AAA GAT ATG CTT GCG GCG TTG CTT GCG GCG	824
Glu Gly Ala Glu Arg Lys Lys Asp Met Leu Ala Ala Leu Leu Ala Ala	
245 250 255	
GAT GAT GGA TTT TCC GAT GAA GAG ATT GTT GAC TTC TTG GTG GCT TTA	872
Asp Asp Gly Phe Ser Asp Glu Glu Ile Val Asp Phe Leu Val Ala Leu	
260 265 270 275	
CTT GTC GCC GGT TAT GAA ACA ACC TCC ACG ATC ATG ACT CTC GCC GTC	920
Leu Val Ala Gly Tyr Glu Thr Thr Ser Thr Ile Met Thr Leu Ala Val	
280 285 290	
AAA TTT CTC ACC GAG ACT CCT TTA GCT CTT GCT CAA CTC AAG GAA GAG	968
Lys Phe Leu Thr Glu Thr Pro Leu Ala Leu Ala Gln Leu Lys Glu Glu	
295 300 305	
CAT GAA AAG ATT AGG GCA ATG AAG AGT GAT TCG TAT AGT CTT GAA TGG	1016
His Glu Lys Ile Arg Ala Met Lys Ser Asp Ser Tyr Ser Leu Glu Trp	
310 315 320	
AGT GAT TAC AAG TCA ATG CCA TTC ACA CAA TGT GTG GTT AAT GAG ACG	1064
Ser Asp Tyr Lys Ser Met Pro Phe Thr Gln Cys Val Val Asn Glu Thr	
325 330 335	
CTA CGA GTG GCT AAC ATC ATC GGC GGT GTT TTC AGA CGT GCA ATG ACG	1112
Leu Arg Val Ala Asn Ile Ile Gly Gly Val Phe Arg Arg Ala Met Thr	
340 345 350 355	
GAT GTT GAG ATC AAA GGT TAT AAA ATT CCA AAA GCG TGG AAA GTA TTC	1160
Asp Val Glu Ile Lys Gly Tyr Lys Ile Pro Lys Gly Trp Lys Val Phe	
360 365 370	
TCA TCG TTT AGA GCG GTT CAT TTA GAC CCA AAC CAC TTC AAA GAT GCT	1208
Ser Ser Phe Arg Ala Val His Leu Asp Pro Asn His Phe Lys Asp Ala	
375 380 385	
CGC ACT TTC AAC CCT TGG AGA TGG CAG AGC AAC TCG GTA ACG ACA GGC	1256
Arg Thr Phe Asn Pro Trp Arg Trp Gln Ser Asn Ser Val Thr Thr Gly	
390 395 400	
CCT TCT AAT GTG TTC ACA CCG TTT GGT GGA GGG CCA AGG CTA TGT CCC	1304
Pro Ser Asn Val Phe Thr Pro Phe Gly Gly Gly Pro Arg Leu Cys Pro	
405 410 415	
GGT TAC GAG CTG GCT AGG GTT GCA CTC TCT GTT TTC CTT CAC CGC CTA	1352
Gly Tyr Glu Leu Ala Arg Val Ala Leu Ser Val Phe Leu His Arg Leu	
420 425 430 435	

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46

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 Phe Pro Thr Thr Arg Thr Gln Lys Arg Tyr Pro Ile Phe Val Lys Arg
 455 460 465

CGT GAT TTT GCT ACT TGA AGAAGAAGAG ACCCATCTGA TTTTATTTAT 1496
 Arg Asp Phe Ala Thr *
 470

AGAACAACAG TATTTTTCAG GATTAATTTT TTCTTCTTTT TTTGCCTCCT TGTGGGTCTA 1556

GTGTTTGACA ATAAAAGTTA TCATTACTCT ATAAAGCCTT AGCTTCTGTG TA 1608

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 2:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

- (A) LENGTH: 473 amino acids
 (B) TYPE: amino acid
 (D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: protein

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 2:

Met Ala Phe Thr Ala Phe Leu Leu Leu Leu Ser Ser Ile Ala Ala Gly
 1 5 10 15

Phe Leu Leu Leu Leu Arg Arg Thr Arg Tyr Arg Arg Met Gly Leu Pro
 20 25 30

Pro Gly Ser Leu Gly Leu Pro Leu Ile Gly Glu Thr Phe Gln Leu Ile
 35 40 45

Gly Ala Tyr Lys Thr Glu Asn Pro Glu Pro Phe Ile Asp Glu Arg Val
 50 55 60

Ala Arg Tyr Gly Ser Val Phe Met Thr His Leu Phe Gly Glu Pro Thr
 65 70 75 80

Ile Phe Ser Ala Asp Pro Glu Thr Asn Arg Phe Val Leu Gln Asn Glu
 85 90 95

Gly Lys Leu Phe Glu Cys Ser Tyr Pro Ala Ser Ile Cys Asn Leu Leu
 100 105 110

Gly Lys His Ser Leu Leu Leu Met Lys Gly Ser Leu His Lys Arg Met
 115 120 125

His Ser Leu Thr Met Ser Phe Ala Asn Ser Ser Ile Ile Lys Asp His
 130 135 140

Leu Met Leu Asp Ile Asp Arg Leu Val Arg Phe Asn Leu Asp Ser Trp
 145 150 155 160

Ser Ser Arg Val Leu Leu Met Glu Glu Ala Lys Lys Ile Thr Phe Glu

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47

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Ser Leu Arg Lys Glu Tyr Leu Leu Val Ile Glu Gly Phe Phe Ser Leu	195	200		205	
Pro Leu Pro Leu Phe Ser Thr Thr Tyr Arg Lys Ala Ile Gln Ala Arg	210	215		220	
Arg Lys Val Ala Glu Ala Leu Thr Val Val Val Met Lys Arg Arg Glu	225	230		235	240
Glu Glu Glu Glu Gly Ala Glu Arg Lys Lys Asp Met Leu Ala Ala Leu	245		250		255
Leu Ala Ala Asp Asp Gly Phe Ser Asp Glu Glu Ile Val Asp Phe Leu	260		265		270
Val Ala Leu Leu Val Ala Gly Tyr Glu Thr Thr Ser Thr Ile Met Thr	275		280		285
Leu Ala Val Lys Phe Leu Thr Glu Thr Pro Leu Ala Leu Ala Gln Leu	290		295		300
Lys Glu Glu His Glu Lys Ile Arg Ala Met Lys Ser Asp Ser Tyr Ser	305		310		315
Leu Glu Trp Ser Asp Tyr Lys Ser Met Pro Phe Thr Gln Cys Val Val	325		330		335
Asn Glu Thr Leu Arg Val Ala Asn Ile Ile Gly Gly Val Phe Arg Arg	340		345		350
Ala Met Thr Asp Val Glu Ile Lys Gly Tyr Lys Ile Pro Lys Gly Trp	355		360		365
Lys Val Phe Ser Ser Phe Arg Ala Val His Leu Asp Pro Asn His Phe	370		375		380
Lys Asp Ala Arg Thr Phe Asn Pro Trp Arg Trp Gln Ser Asn Ser Val	385		390		395
Thr Thr Gly Pro Ser Asn Val Phe Thr Pro Phe Gly Gly Gly Pro Arg	405		410		415
Leu Cys Pro Gly Tyr Glu Leu Ala Arg Val Ala Leu Ser Val Phe Leu	420		425		430
His Arg Leu Val Thr Gly Phe Ser Trp Val Pro Ala Glu Gln Asp Lys	435		440		445
Leu Val Phe Phe Pro Thr Thr Arg Thr Gln Lys Arg Tyr Pro Ile Phe	450		455		460
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48

(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 3:

- (i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:
 - (A) LENGTH: 4937 base pairs
 - (B) TYPE: nucleic acid
 - (C) STRANDEDNESS: double
 - (D) TOPOLOGY: linear
- (ii) MOLECULE TYPE: DNA (genomic)
- (iii) HYPOTHETICAL: NO
- (iv) ANTI-SENSE: NO
- (vi) ORIGINAL SOURCE:
 - (A) ORGANISM: *Arabidopsis thaliana*
 - (B) STRAIN: cv. Columbia
- (vii) IMMEDIATE SOURCE:
 - (A) LIBRARY: lambda gt10
 - (B) CLONE: c204
- (ix) FEATURE:
 - (A) NAME/KEY: CDS
 - (B) LOCATION: join(968..1483, 1680..1829, 1917..2165, 3903..3989, 4084..4162, 4248..4354, 4446..4576, 4674..4773)
- (xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 3:

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TGATAAATTT GAAAATCTGT GTGTTAGAGA TGTTTGAAAC AAAATTTAGA ATAGTATCGA      720
AAATATTTTA TCCTTATTTA AAAAATTCAT ATTTTATGAA GAAGTTATTA TTCACTGCTT      780
ACTGTATTTT AGAAAATTAC TTATAATTTA GAAGAAAAAG AAAAGAAAAG AAGAAGAATG      840

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50

Ser	Phe	Asp	Pro	Gly	Glu	Trp	Ser	Glu	Ser	Leu	Arg	Lys	Glu	Tyr	Leu	
185						190					195					
CTT	GTC	ATC	GAA	GGC	TTC	TTC	TCT	CTT	CCT	CTC	CCT	CTC	TTC	TCC	ACC	1808
Leu	Val	Ile	Glu	Gly	Phe	Phe	Ser	Leu	Pro	Leu	Pro	Leu	Phe	Ser	Thr	
200					205					210					215	
ACT	TAC	CGC	AAA	GCC	ATC	CAA	GTATATATTT	CGTTTCATTT	ACTAATTCTT							1859
Thr	Tyr	Arg	Lys	Ala	Ile	Gln										
				220												
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Ala	Arg	Arg	Lys	Val	Ala	Glu	Ala	Leu	Thr	Val	Val	Val	Met	Lys	Arg	
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Arg	Glu	Glu	Glu	Glu	Glu	Gly	Ala	Glu	Arg	Lys	Lys	Asp	Met	Leu	Ala	
	240					245						250				
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Ala	Leu	Leu	Ala	Ala	Asp	Asp	Gly	Phe	Ser	Asp	Glu	Glu	Ile	Val	Asp	
255					260					265					270	
TTC	TTG	GTG	GCT	TTA	CTT	GTC	GCC	GGT	TAT	GAA	ACA	ACC	TCC	ACG	ATC	2108
Phe	Leu	Val	Ala	Leu	Leu	Val	Ala	Gly	Tyr	Glu	Thr	Thr	Ser	Thr	Ile	
				275					280					285		
ATG	ACT	CTC	GCC	GTC	AAA	TTT	CTC	ACC	GAG	ACT	CCT	TTA	GCT	CTT	GCT	2156
Met	Thr	Leu	Ala	Val	Lys	Phe	Leu	Thr	Glu	Thr	Pro	Leu	Ala	Leu	Ala	
			290					295					300			

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Gln Leu Lys	
305	
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53

CCA AGG CTA TGT CCC GGT TAC GAG CTG GCT AGG GTT GCA CTC TCT GTT 4547
 Pro Arg Leu Cys Pro Gly Tyr Glu Leu Ala Arg Val Ala Leu Ser Val
 415 420 425 430

TTC CTT CAC CGC CTA GTG ACA GGC TTC AG GTATATATAC CTTACATAG 4596
 Phe Leu His Arg Leu Val Thr Gly Phe Ser
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 Phe Pro Thr Thr Arg Thr Gln Lys Arg Tyr Pro Ile Phe Val Lys Arg
 455 460 465

CGT GAT TTT GCT ACT TGA AGAAGAAGAG ACCCATCTGA TTTTATTAT 4803
 Arg Asp Phe Ala Thr *

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(2) INFORMATION FOR SEQ ID NO: 4:

(i) SEQUENCE CHARACTERISTICS:

(A) LENGTH: 473 amino acids

(B) TYPE: amino acid

(D) TOPOLOGY: linear

(ii) MOLECULE TYPE: protein

(xi) SEQUENCE DESCRIPTION: SEQ ID NO: 4:

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 1 5 10 15

Phe Leu Leu Leu Leu Arg Arg Thr Arg Tyr Arg Arg Met Gly Leu Pro
 20 25 30

Pro Gly Ser Leu Gly Leu Pro Leu Ile Gly Glu Thr Phe Gln Leu Ile
 35 40 45

Gly Ala Tyr Lys Thr Glu Asn Pro Glu Pro Phe Ile Asp Glu Arg Val
 50 55 60

Ala Arg Tyr Gly Ser Val Phe Met Thr His Leu Phe Gly Glu Pro Thr
 65 70 75 80

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55

Lys Val Phe Ser Ser Phe Arg Ala Val His Leu Asp Pro Asn His Phe
 370 375 380

Lys Asp Ala Arg Thr Phe Asn Pro Trp Arg Trp Gln Ser Asn Ser Val
 385 390 395 400

Thr Thr Gly Pro Ser Asn Val Phe Thr Pro Phe Gly Gly Gly Pro Arg
 405 410 415

Leu Cys Pro Gly Tyr Glu Leu Ala Arg Val Ala Leu Ser Val Phe Leu
 420 425 430

His Arg Leu Val Thr Gly Phe Ser Trp Val Pro Ala Glu Gln Asp Lys
 435 440 445

Leu Val Phe Phe Pro Thr Thr Arg Thr Gln Lys Arg Tyr Pro Ile Phe
 450 455 460

Val Lys Arg Arg Asp Phe Ala Thr *

465

470

CLAIMS

1. A nucleic acid molecule encoding a protein having the enzymatic activity of a cytochrome P450-type hydroxylase or encoding a biologically active fragment of such a protein, selected from the group consisting of:
 - (a) nucleic acid molecules coding for a polypeptide having the amino acid sequence given in SEQ ID NO: 2;
 - (b) nucleic acid molecules comprising the coding region of the nucleotide sequence given in SEQ ID NO:1;
 - (c) the nucleic acid molecule of SEQ ID NO:3;
 - (d) nucleic acid molecules hybridizing to a nucleic acid molecule of (a), (b) or (c); and
 - (e) nucleic acid molecules which are degenerate as a result of the genetic code to the nucleic acid molecules of any one of (a) to (d).
2. The nucleic acid molecule of claim 1, wherein the encoded protein is a hydroxylase which is involved in the conversion of cathasterone to teasterone.
3. The nucleic acid molecule of claim 1 or 2 which is DNA.
4. A nucleic acid probe specifically hybridizing with a nucleic acid molecule of any one of claims 1 to 3.
5. A vector comprising a nucleic acid molecule of any one of claims 1 to 3.
6. The vector of claim 5 in which the nucleic acid molecule is linked to regulatory elements which allow for the expression of the nucleic acid molecule in procaryotic or eucaryotic cells.

7. A host cell containing a-vector of claim 5 or 6 or a nucleic acid molecule of anyone of claims 1 to 3.
8. The host cell of claim 7 which is a bacterial, fungal, plant or animal cell.
9. A protein encoded by a nucleic acid molecule of anyone of claims 1 to 3 or a biologically active fragment thereof.
10. An antibody specifically recognizing a protein of claim 9 or a fragment or epitope thereof.
11. A process for the preparation of the protein of claim 9 or a biologically active fragment thereof wherein a host cell of claim 7 or 8 is cultivated under conditions allowing expression of the nucleic acid sequence and the resulting protein is recovered from the cell culture.
12. Transgenic plant cell comprising stably integrated into the genome a nucleic acid molecule of any one of claims 1 to 3 which is linked to regulatory elements allowing expression of the nucleic acid molecule in plant cells.
13. A transgenic plant comprising plant cells of claim 12.
14. The transgenic plant of claim 13 in which the brassinosteroid synthesis is altered.
15. The transgenic plant of claim 13 or 14 which displays at least one of the following features:
 - * improved pathogene response;
 - * modified morphology;
 - * increased cell elongation;

* modified wood production.

16. A transgenic plant cell containing stably integrated into the genome a nucleic acid molecule of any one of claims 1 to 3 or a part thereof, wherein the expression of the nucleic acid molecule or part thereof leads to a reduction of the synthesis of a protein of claim 9 in the cells.
17. The plant cell of claim 16, wherein the reduction is achieved by an antisense, ribozyme and/or cosuppression effect.
18. A transgenic plant comprising plant cells of claim 16 or 17.
19. The transgenic plant of claim 18 which displays a deficiency in brassinosteroid synthesis.
20. The transgenic plant of claim 18 or 19 which displays at least one of the following features:
 - * dwarfism;
 - * reduced elongation of the hypocotyl of seed germinating in the dark;
 - * improved stress tolerance;
 - * male sterility.
21. A cultured plant tissue comprising plant cells of claim 12 or of claim 16.
22. Harvestable parts of plants of any one of claims 13 to 15 comprising cells of claim 12.
23. Harvestable parts of plants of any one of claims 18 to 20 comprising cells of claim 16 or 17.
24. Propagation material of plants of any one of claims 13 to 15 comprising cells of claim 2.

25. Propagation material of any one of claims 18 to 20 comprising cells of claim 16 or 17.
26. A method for the identification of nucleic acid molecules coding for proteins which are involved in brassinosteroid synthesis in plants or in its regulation comprising the steps of:
- (a) screening naturally occurring, mutagenized or genetically engineered dwarf mutants for those whose seedlings upon germination in the dark display no or only little elongation of the hypocotyl;
 - (b) identifying those dwarf mutants identified in step (a) in which elongation of the hypocotyl in the dark can be stimulated by adding different brassinosteroids or brassinosteroid-like compounds;
 - (c) identification and isolation of the gene(s) which are capable of complementing those dwarf mutants identified in step (b);
 - (d) characterization of the isolated gene(s) and its (their) encoded product(s).
27. The method of claim 26, wherein the dwarf mutant is a plant of any one of claims 18 to 20.
28. Nucleic acid molecules obtainable by the method of claim 26 or 27.
29. A method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as brassinosteroids in plants comprising the steps of:
- (a) contacting a transgenic plant of claim 16, or a mutant as identified by steps (a) and (b) of the method of claim 26 which show a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis, with a plurality of compounds; and
 - (b) determining those compounds which are capable of compensating in the plants or mutants as defined in (a) the effects that resulted from defects in the brassinosteroid synthesis.

30. A method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as brassinosteroids in plants comprising the steps of:
- (a) contacting germinating seeds of a plant of claim 16 or of a mutant as identified in steps (a) and (b) of claim 26 which show a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis, with a plurality of compounds; and
 - (b) determining those compounds which are capable of restoring normal growth of the hypocotyl and/or roots in the seedlings.
31. A method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as inhibitors of brassinosteroids or can suppress the biological activities of brassinosteroids comprising the steps of
- (a) contacting plant cells of claim 12 or plants of claims 13 to 15 with a plurality of chemical compounds; and
 - (b) identifying those compounds which lead to a weakening of the effects which resulted from altered brassinosteroid synthesis in these cells or plants.
32. A method for the identification of chemical compounds which can act as inhibitors of brassinosteroids or can suppress the biological activities of brassinosteroids comprising the steps of:
- (a) contacting germinating seedlings of a plant according to claim 16 or a mutant as identified by steps (a) and (b) of the method of claim 26 which show reduced elongation of the hypocotyl when germinating in the dark due to a defect in brassinosteroid synthesis, with brassinosteroids which are capable of restoring normal elongation of the hypocotyl and simultaneously with a plurality of chemical compounds; and
 - (b) determining those compounds which compete with the brassinosteroids to restore normal elongation of the hypocotyl.

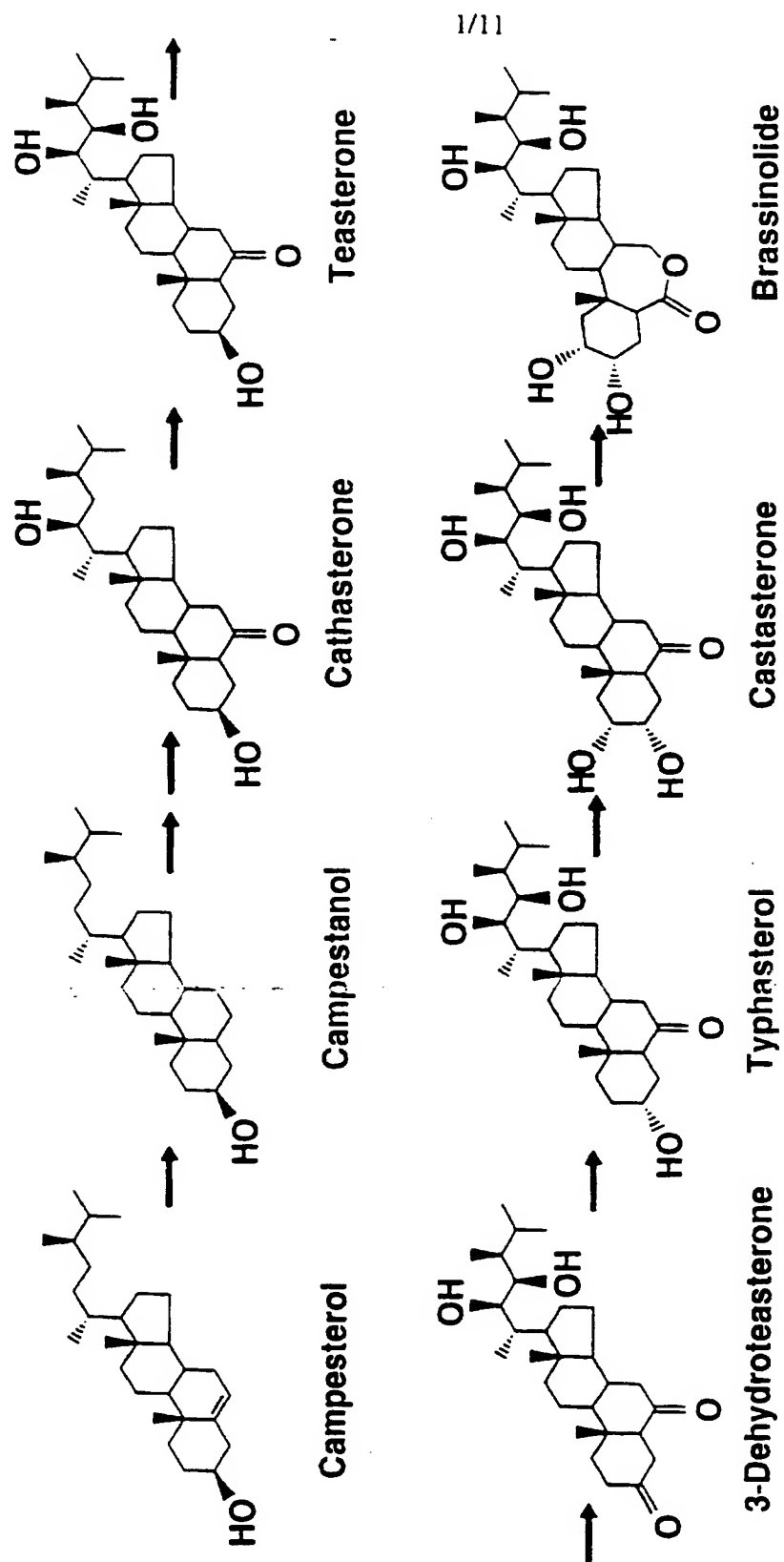


Figure 1

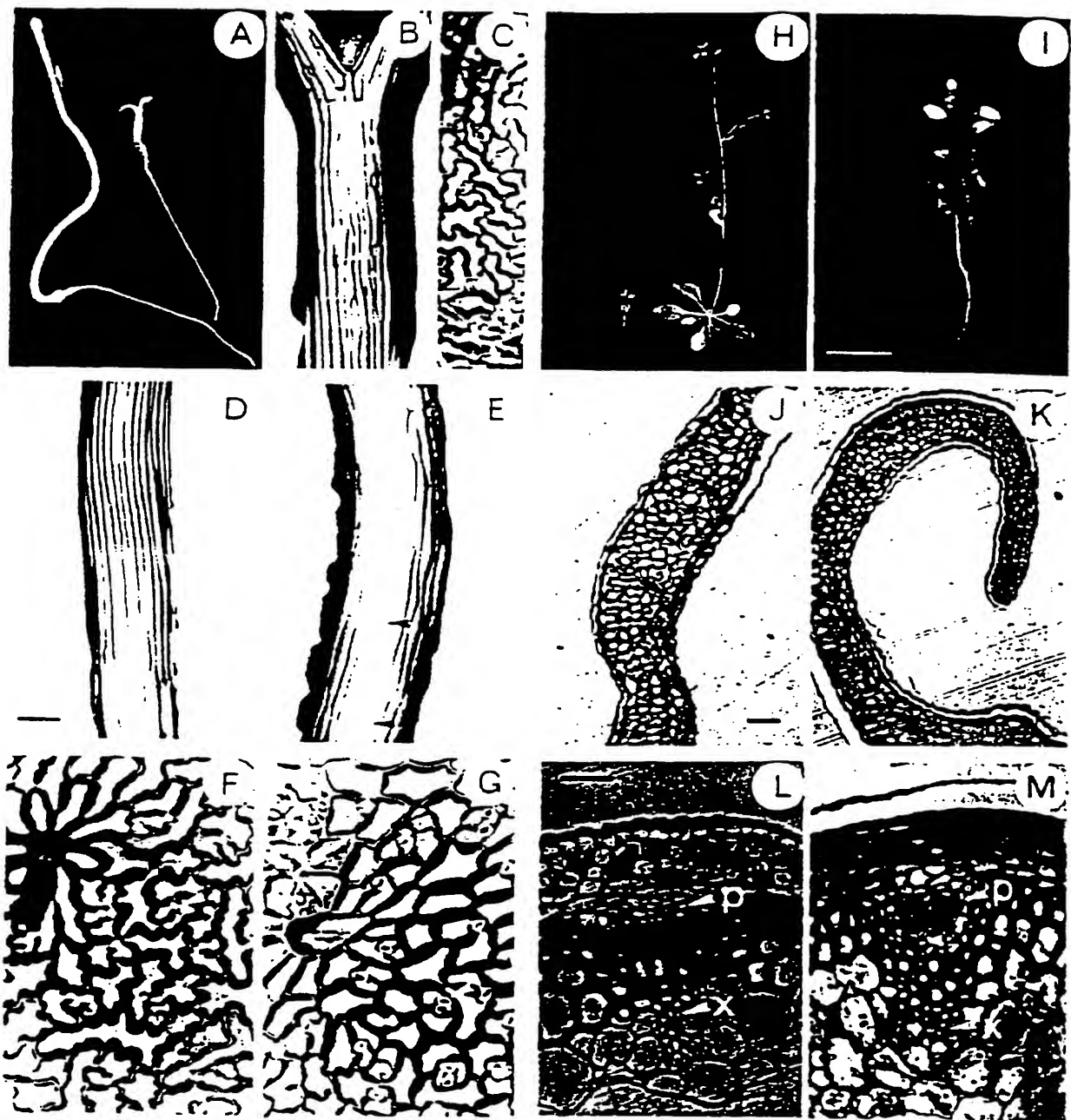


Figure 2

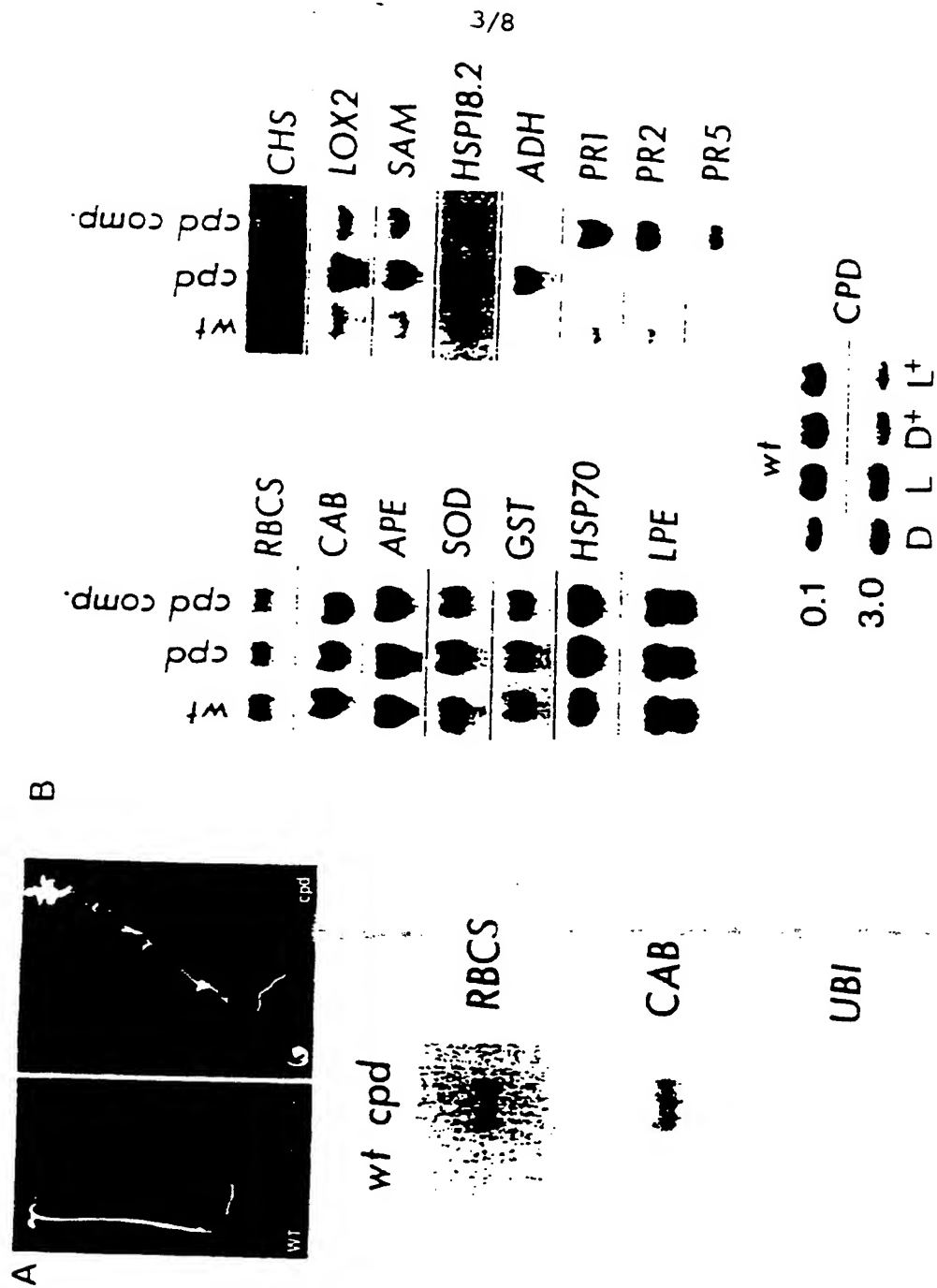
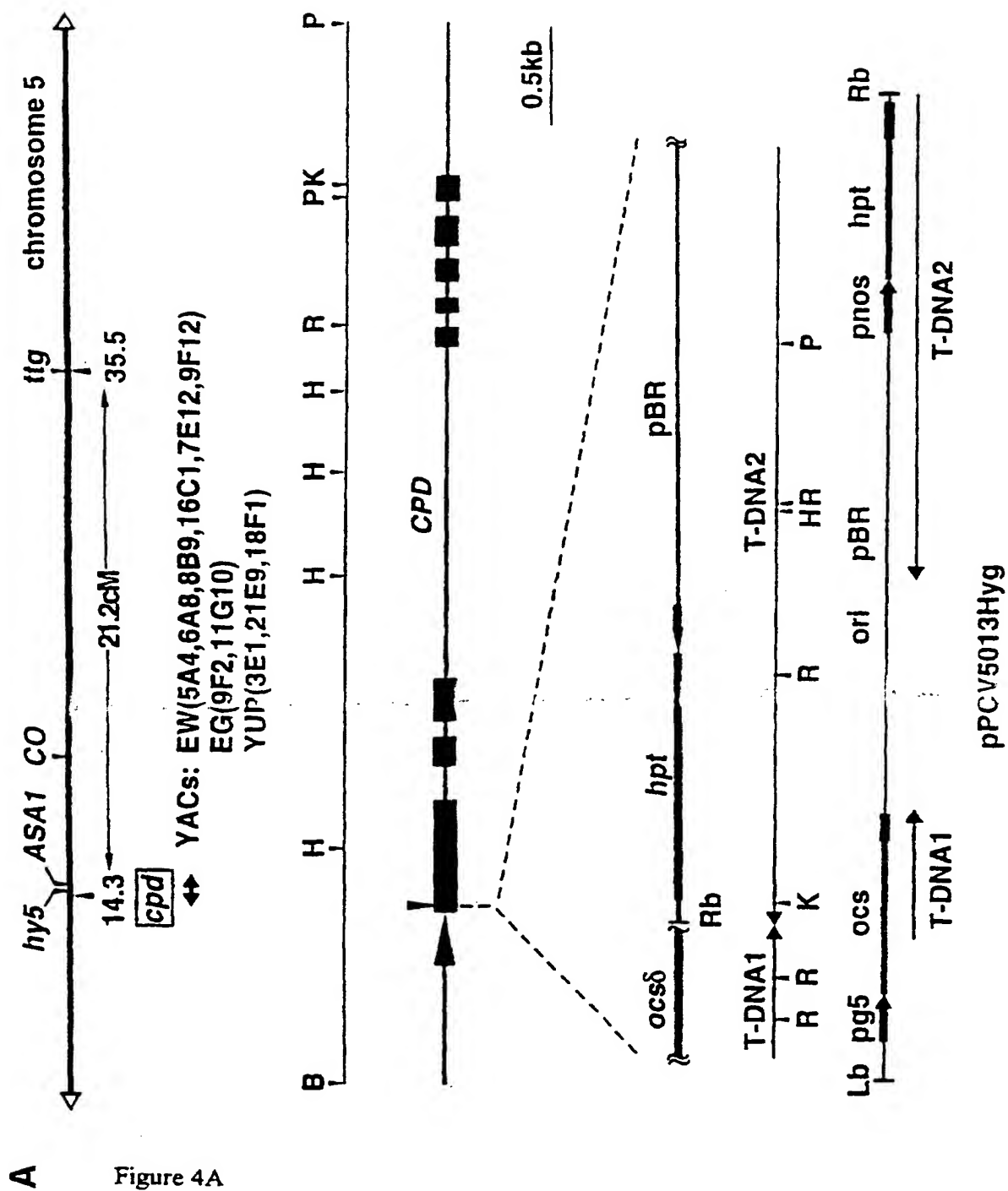


Figure 3

4/11



5/11

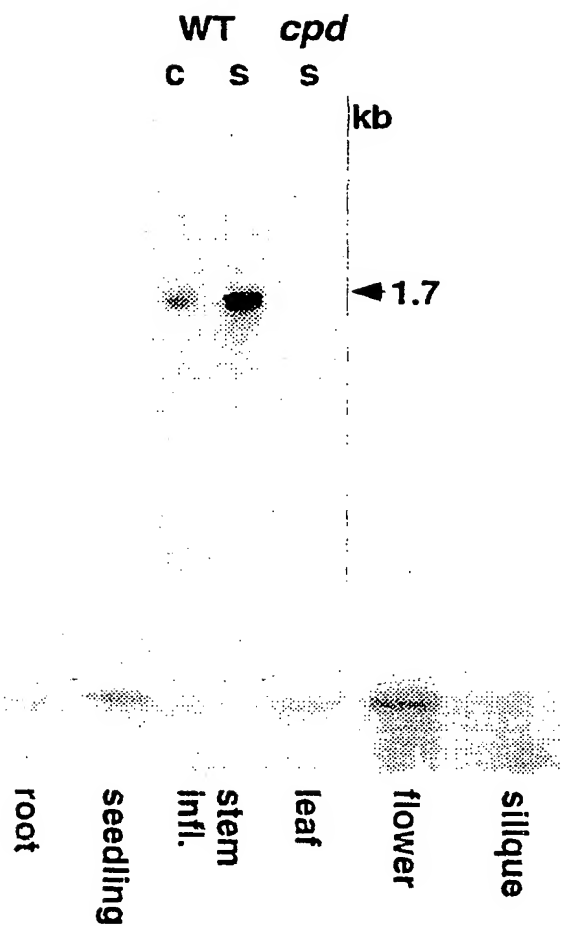
B

Figure 4B

6/11

A

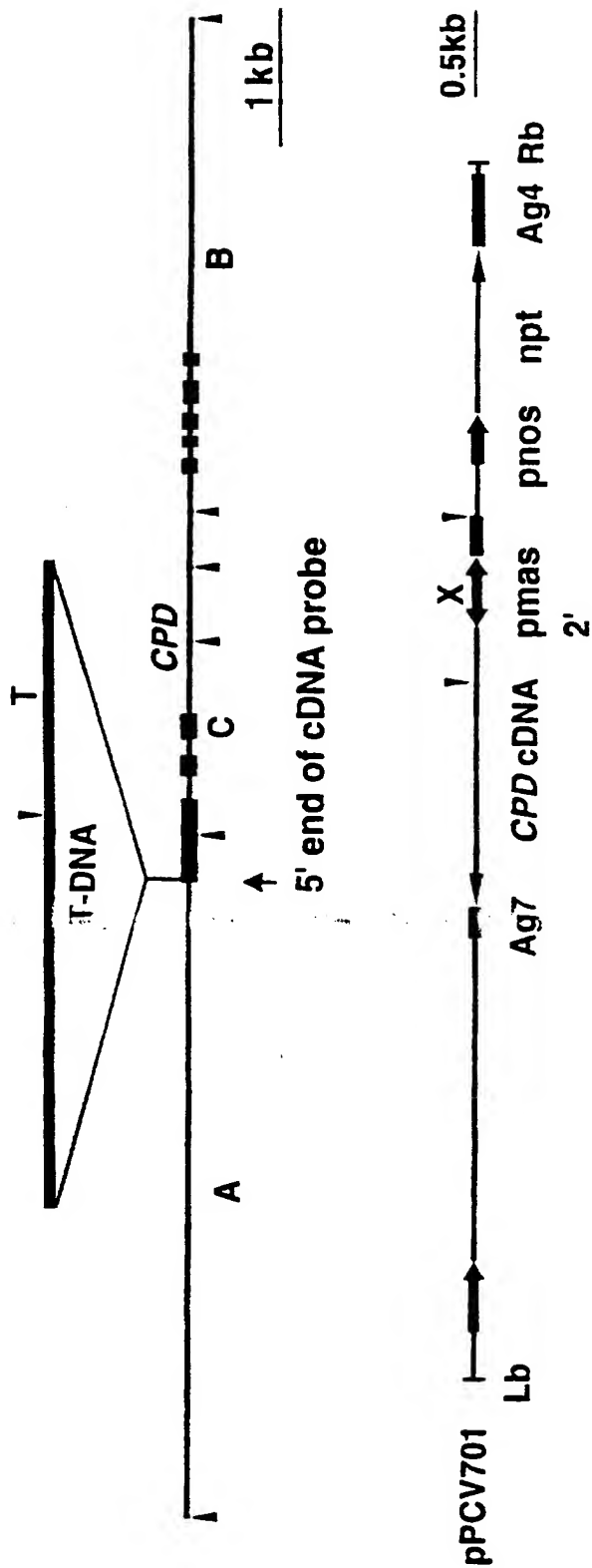


Figure 5

7/11

B



C

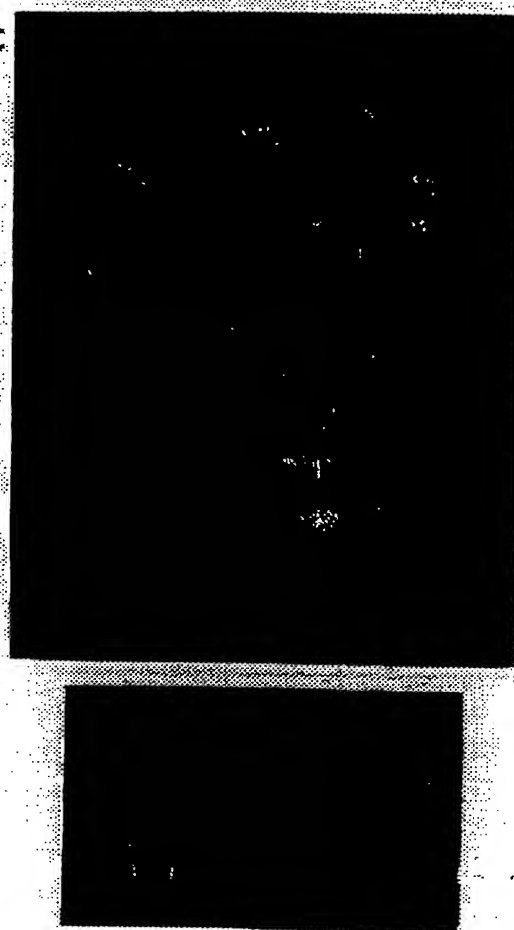


Figure 5 (cont'd)

Pro dom.

anchor reg.

CYP90
CYP88
CYP71B1
CYP76A2
CYP73
CYP2B1
CYP21A2

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MDIYIVAALVIEASDI IAKSKR--KPKKNUPPGPPRLPIIGNLIHQI--C-
MEWESYVFEESAI IILPAFI IFFSQKNTTKSSYKEPPGPPG-LPIFGNMGEL--C-
MDIIEKTLVALFAAIIGAILISKTTGRUUPPGPRG-VPIFGNHLQV--C-
MEPTIIGALLLVGFTAMV RGHPKSRG--NEPPGPRP-LPIIGNLIHQI--C-
MLLLGALLLPLIAGARLGNHWHKRI--SLHLPPLAPGFTHLLQPDLPYLLC--G

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-----LTQKEGPIYRUHGLQDVVVLNSKRQIEEAMVKKHAD-AGRPEPLTYKLVSRNYPDLSL-GDYSILAHKQCTRSALLLG-IPDSMEPVVE 140

8/11

RL-----VRENLDSS-HSSRV-----LLMEEAKKIIFELTVQILMSFDPGE-----HSESLRKEVYLLVIEGFEELPQGE 213
RT-----VTSSDQA-MADHG-----GSVGFELTELRRMTFKIIVQIFLCSA-----DQATTRALERSITELNYSTRAMAINLP 257
EEVASFVRENKQA-ASSEE-----TVNLSQILKMSGSMICRIGEGINL-----EGSKLNTYQSIIVQAF-----VLGSLA 213
KCYDNMLKWIKE-ANSAEKGSGIEVTRFVFLASFNLGNLILSKDL-----ADLESEASEFFIAMKRINEHSGIAN 217
AEAMAVDDVKGNPAAATE-----GIVIRRRQLAMTYNNMFRIMEDRUF-----ESEDPLFVCLKAL-NGERSRLA 216
TM-----RDGEMGK-RGVEE-----RIQEEAOCLVEEARKSQCAPDETFLFQCITANI ICSI VGERFDYTORQFLRLLELFYRTFBLSSFSQVFEES-GACYE 224
QL-TQEFCEMRRAQPGTRY-----AIEEFESILLCSIIICYLT--EGDKI-----KODNIMPAVYKCIQEVLTKTHSHS 205

Figure 6

dioxigen-bdg.

STTV-----RKAQARRKVAEALTVWARRREEEEGAEK-----DCFEDEEVDENALAVAGETTTETMTLAK 292
 GFN-----RCALRAHRLVAALQGLDERVARAKVSGG---GVDMDRGIEAQ-----DERGRHLDDEEIDVAVYALNAGESSGHITHTATV 342
 AVDLPFVIGTIIDRTGLKCEK-----VFHGIDSFDOAIQRHIDPSIKDDIIDLLKMERGEGSLGEYELTREHTKGLDANITAGIDTSAQTMTMT 310
 VSDIFPFLKKFD-LQSLRK3-MARDMG---KAVEIMSFLKEREERKKGTEKGFDDVDEEFQ-GTKDEPAK-LEHEBEKIEVLEMEFLAGETTTSSSVEHMT 323
 QSFENYNGDFIPILRPFLNYLKLCKEYKDKRIQLFDYFVDERKIGST-KKMDNNQLKCAID-HILEAKEKEINEDNVLYIVENINVAIETTLNLSIEHGIA 320
 PGAI-----FOISKNOEILDYIGHIYKHEATLDPSPFD-----FIDTYLME---KEKSNHHEGHNELMISLSLFFAGIETSTTLAYGFL 308
 IQIVDVIPELRFEPNGLERLKKQIEKRDHIVEMQLRQHESLVAQVBD-----MDYMLQGVA-QPSMEEGSQLEGGHVMANADLLICGHEETANTLSHNV 306

steroid bdg.

ETETBUAUAOLAGEIEKIRAMK-GOSYSIEMSDYKSMFEFTOCVWNETLRVANTT-GSVERRAMTDVELKGYKIPKHKVSSSERAVHIDPNIETDARCTNPARW 395
 EQENPDMEFRANKNEDEAMRSIESSQRCGLTRDFRMEYLSQVIDETLRVANS-FVSTRCAITROVFVNGYLIPKHKVQLMYRSVHMDPVYEDPTKEDPSRW 446
 HILANPRVAKKIQAEIREKIKNI-----DEITDDVEQLDYFGL/LKETERISPIVFLVPRVAAKDLKAGYDVEKTHIVNVAWVMSPSIKDPEETNPERF 411
 EILRHPEAANKVITEISQAIENP-----RKEEDSDIENLPMJAVLKGSLRHPPLPFLIPETIQDTKFGYDVPKTOVLVNAHAIIGRDPECHDPMSEKPERF 424
 EVNHIPEIQAKRHELTDKLPG-----VOITEPDVQNLBYLQAVKCTARLRMANPLLPHNLIIDAKLGEDIPAESKILLVNAHHLANNPDOKKPEEERPERF 421
 LMLKYPRVAEKVQKEIDQVIGSH-----RPLDQRSKMEYTDQAIHIEIQFESDLVPIGUPPHRVTDQTMFRGYLLPKNTELY-PILSSAIDPDYEDHDPDSFPERF 407
 ETALHIDEIQORIOEELDHELGPG-ASSSRVPYKQHARLELLINATIAEVLRLRPVPLALPHRTTRPSSISGYDIPGIVIIIPNLOGAHIDETVWERPHEE-----W 406

heme-bdg.

QNS---VTTGPEMTEPFGGGRGCPGYELARVALSVFAHRLVIGFSM---VPAEQDKLVFFPTTRTQKRYPIEVKRDFFAT 472
 EHS-----PRAGTELNFGICNRLCPGNDLAKLEISVELHHIFLIGYKLARTNRCRVRYLPHPRVDNCLAKITRVGS 519
 INQ---TDFKLNFEILLPEGGGRYCPG-MGGLAVVHILTIINILYRFDM---KLPMGMAEELSIEENYGLICVKKLPLEAIPVLTQHT 496
 LSK---IDVKQDHYGLIPEGGRYCPGMLPGLHRTMHFNAGSLRREFEM---ELPGVSPKSNMOGSMGYTARKRDSLKVIIPKKA 505
 LEEAKVEANQDFRYLPEGMGRSCPGIILALPIIGITIGRAVONFEL-LPPGQOSKIDTEKGGQFSHLIKHISTIVAKPRSE 505
 L--ANGALK-KSEAFPESTCKRIQCEGIARNELEFETTLN-FSV---SSILAPKOIDLTPKESGICKIPEPTYQICFSR 484
 PRF---LEPGONSRALAFEGGGRVCEGPEARLELFVVLTRLLONFEL-LSSGDALPSLQPIPIGCSVILKQFEDVLELQPRGMGAISPCQSQ 495

Figure 6 (cont'd)

10/11



Figure 7

11/11

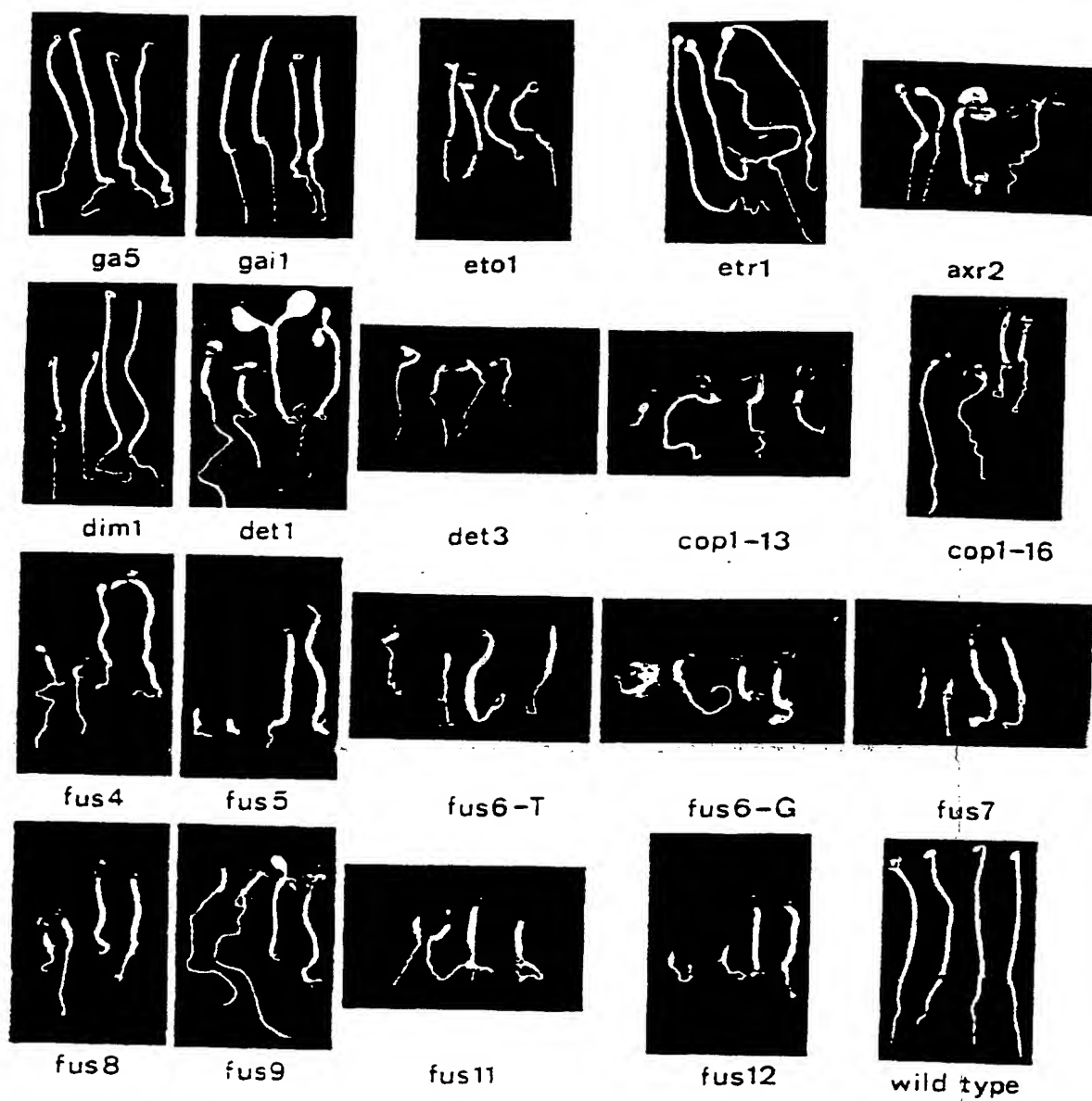


Figure 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Internat. Application No
PCT/EP 97/01586

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 6 C12N15/53 C12N15/82 A01H5/00 C12Q1/02

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6 C12N A01H C12Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	EMBL SEQUENCE DATABASE, RELEASE 44, 2-JUN-1995, ACCESSION NO. X87368, XP002036939 SZEKERES, M.: "A.thaliana gene cytochrome P450" see sequence	1-9,28
X	EMBL SEQUENCE DATABASE, REL. 44, 2-JUN-1995, ACCESSION NO. X87367, XP002036940 SZEKERES, M.: "A.thaliana mRNA for cytochrome P450" see sequence	1-9,28

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

5 August 1997

Date of mailing of the international search report

21.08.97

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Maddox, A

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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PCT/EP 97/01586

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Internat'l Application No

PCT/EP 97/01586

C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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